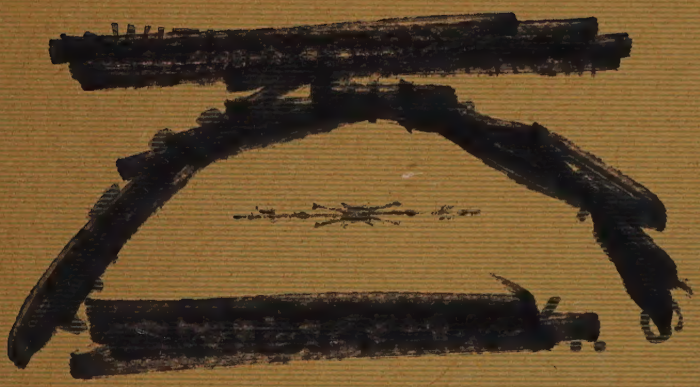
Eugene O'Neill.

O'NEILL



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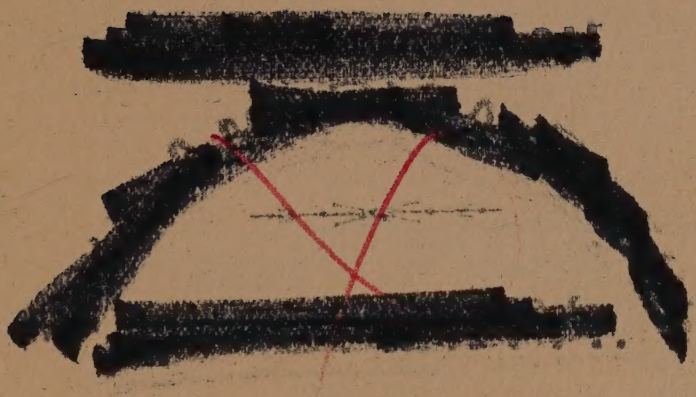
A play, Marco Millions

MARCO MILLIONS



EUGENE O'NEILL

A Play

MARCO MILLIONS

NEW YORK
BONI & LIVERIGHT
1927

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FOREWORD

This play is an attempt to render poetic justice to one long famous as a traveler, unjustly world-renowned as a liar, but sadly unrecognized by posterity in his true eminence as a man and a citizen—Marco Polo of Venice. The failure to appraise Polo at a fair valuation is his own fault. He dictated the book of his travels but left the traveler out. He was no author. He stuck to a recital of what he considered facts and the world called him a liar for his pains. Even in his native Venice, he was scoffingly nicknamed "the millionaire," or "Marco Millions." They could not take seriously his impressive statistics about the "millions" of this and the "millions" of that in the East. Polo, the man of brass tacks, became celebrated as an extravagant romancer and ever since has traveled down the prejudiced centuries, a prophet without honor, or even notoriety, save in false whiskers. This has moved me to an indignant crusade between the lines of his book, the bars of his prison, in order to whitewash the good soul of that maligned Venetian.

CHARACTERS

CHRISTIANS (in the order in which they appear):

A TRAVELER
MARCO POLO
DONATA
NICOLO POLO, Marco's father
MAFFEO POLO, Marco's uncle
TEDALDO, Legate of Syria (afterward Pope Gregory X)
A DOMINICAN MONK
A KNIGHT-CRUSADER
A PAPAL COURIER
PAULO LOREDANO, Donata's father, a gentleman from Venice

Ladies and gentlemen of Venice, soldiers, people of Acre, musicians, servants, etc.

HEATHEN (in the order in which they appear):

A MAGIAN TRAVELER
A BUDDHIST TRAVELER
A MAHOMETAN CAPTAIN OF GHAZAN'S ARMY
THE ALI BROTHERS, Mahometan merchants
A PROSTITUTE
A DERVISH
TWO BUDDHIST MERCHANTS
TWO TARTAR MERCHANTS

A Mongol Priest

Emissary from Kublai

Kublai, the Great Kaan

Princess Kukachin, his granddaughter

Chu-Yin, a Cathayan sage

General Bayan

A Messenger from Persia

Ghazan, Khan of Persia

A Buddhist Priest

A Taoist Priest

A Confucian Priest

A Moslem Priest

A Tartar Chronicler

People of Persia, India, Mongolia, Cathay, courtiers, nobles, ladies, wives, warriors of Kublai's court, musicians, dancers, Chorus of Mourners.

PART ONE

PROLOGUE: A sacred tree in Persia near the confines of India toward the close of the thirteenth century.

ACT ONE:

Scene One: Exterior of DONATA's house, Venice—twenty-three years earlier.

Scene Two: Palace of the Papal Legate of Syria at Acre—six months later.

Scene Three: Persia—four months later.

Scene Four: India—eight months later.

Scene Five: Mongolia—eleven months later.

Scene Six: Cathay—The Grand Throne Room in KUBLAI's palace at Cambaluc—one month later.

ACT TWO:

Scene One: The Little Throne Room in KUBLAI's summer palace at Xanadu, "the city of Peace," fifteen years later.

Scene Two: The royal wharf at the seaport of Zayton, several weeks later.

Scene Three: Deck of the royal junk of the Princess Ku-kachin at anchor in the harbor of Hormuz, Persia—two years later.

ACT THREE:

Scene One: The Grand Throne Room in the Imperial Palace at Cambaluc, one year later—and later the Dining Room of the Polo Home in Venice at the same time.

Scene Two: The Grand Throne Room at Cambaluc—one year later.

EPILOGUE: The theatre.

PROLOGUE

"MARCO MILLIONS"

PROLOGUE

SCENE: *A sacred tree on a vast plain in Persia near the confines of India. Votive offerings, pieces of cloth torn from clothing, bangles, armlets, ornaments, tapers, have been nailed on the trunk or tied to the branches. The heavy limbs spread out to a great distance from the trunk. Beneath them is deep cool shade, contrasting with the blinding glare of the noon sun on the sandy plain in the background. A merchant carrying in each hand a strapped box that resembles a modern sample case, plods wearily to the foot of the tree. He puts the boxes down and takes out a handkerchief to mop his forehead. He is a white Christian, middle-aged, average-looking, with a moustache and beard beginning to show gray. His clothes in the style of the Italian merchant class of the thirteenth century are travel-worn. He sighs, tired and hot.*

Phoo!

[*From the left a* MAGIAN, *a Persian, dressed in the fashion of a trader, comes in. He carries a small, square bag. He also is hot, weary, and dust-covered. In age and appearance, making allowance for the difference in race, he closely resembles the* CHRISTIAN. *He and the latter*

stare at each other, then bow perfunctorily. The MAGIAN *sets down his bag and wipes his brow*]

CHRISTIAN

[*Sympathetically*]

Hot as hell!

MAGIAN

[*Grimly*]

Hotter!

[*They both chuckle. A* BUDDHIST, *a Kashmiri traveling merchant comes in, puffing and sweating, from the right. He has a pack strapped on his back. He resembles the other two in the essential character of his body and face. He stops on seeing them. After eyeing him for an appraising second, the two bow and the* BUDDHIST *comes forward to set his pack beside the bags of the others*]

BUDDHIST

[*With relief*]

Phoo!

[*Then breaking the ice*]

The sun would cook you!

MAGIAN

It is hot certainly.

CHRISTIAN

[*As they all sit down to rest, looks from one to the other—jovially*]

Funny! You'd think we three had an appointment here. Your faces look familiar. Haven't I seen you somewheres before?

MAGIAN

In the house of the courtezans at Shiraz. You were drunk.

The King's Library

BUDDHIST

I happened to be there that night, too. You danced and sang lewd songs.

CHRISTIAN

[*A bit embarrassed, but grinning*]

Humn—oh, yes—I remember. It was my birthday and I'd taken a drop too much—a very unusual thing for me.

[*Then abruptly changing the subject*]

How are conditions down your way?

BUDDHIST

[*Pursing his lips*]

Slow. I come from Delhi. There is a new import tax and trade is very unsettled. We make prayer beads.

MAGIAN

[*Gloomily*]

And I, for my sins, am hawking a novelty, a block-printed book, for an Arab house. It contains one thousand Arabian lies, with one over for good measure, all full of lechery—at least so they instructed me to tell people to get them to buy.

CHRISTIAN

Did your trip take you down around Ispahan way?

MAGIAN

I just came from there. It is a sad city now. All the bazaars have been closed by an imperial edict in mourning for Queen Kukachin.

CHRISTIAN

[*Bounding to his feet as if a wasp had stung him*]

Is Queen Kukachin dead?

[*Stunned*]

Why, I've got a letter of introduction to her from the head of

my firm—Marco Polo of Polo Brothers and Son, Venice. He acted as her official escort, and took her from Cathay to Persia to be married! Why, I was counting on selling her and her husband a whole fleet load of goods!

MAGIAN

[*Suddenly, pointing off left*]

What makes that cloud of dust?

[*They all stare and begin to grow worried*]

CHRISTIAN

It doesn't look like camels.

BUDDHIST

[*Fearfully*]

It has a strange look!

CHRISTIAN

It's coming directly this way.

MAGIAN

These plains are haunted by evil spirits.

CHRISTIAN

[*Very frightened, but striving to put up a brave front*]

I've heard those rumors. And I know for a fact that people are sometimes possessed by devils, but I don't believe—

BUDDHIST

[*Suddenly, pointing to the tree*]

I am going to offer a prayer for protection to this tree sacred to Buddha.

CHRISTIAN

MAGIAN

[*In chorus—irritably*]

Sacred to Buddha?

BUDDHIST

Certainly! Do you not know the legend of how the Holy Sakya picked a twig to cleanse his teeth, and then throwing it away, it took root, and sprang up into this mighty tree to testify forever to his miraculous power?

CHRISTIAN

[*Resentfully*]

You're absolutely all wrong! This tree was the staff of our first father, Adam. It was handed down to Moses who used it to tap water out of stones and finally planted it. The cross our Lord was crucified on was made of this wood. And ever since this tree has been sacred to Him!

MAGIAN

[*Cuttingly*]

You have both of you been duped by childish lies! This tree is sacred to the founder of the one true religion, Zoroaster, who brought a shoot of the Tree of Life down from Paradise and planted it here!

BUDDHIST

[*Scornfully*]

You are a pair of superstitious sheep!

CHRISTIAN

You are a couple of idolatrous dogs!

MAGIAN

The two of you are blasphemous hogs!

[*They glare at each other insultingly, their hands on their daggers. Suddenly they hear a noise from the left. Their eyes at once are turned in that direction and, forgetting personal animosities, they give a startled exclamation at what they see*]

BUDDHIST

They are pulling a chariot!

CHRISTIAN

They must be slaves. See how the driver lashes them!

BUDDHIST

But what can that be on the wagon—like a coffin!

CHRISTIAN

It must be treasure!

MAGIAN

No. It is a coffin.

[*Trembling*]

Ssst! I have a foreboding of evil.

[*They prostrate themselves, their faces to the ground. A moment later, preceded by shouts, a cracking of whips, and the dull stamping of feet, a double file of thirty men of different ages, stripped to the waist, harnessed to each other waist-to-waist and to the long pole of a two-wheeled wagon, stagger in, straining forward under the lashes of two soldiers who run beside them and the long whips of the* CAPTAIN *and a* CORPORAL *who are riding on the wagon, the* CAPTAIN *driving. As they reach the middle of the shade they stop. Lashed on the wagon is a coffin covered with a white pall*]

CAPTAIN

[*A brutal, determined-looking man of forty, bellows*]

Halt!

[*The files of bleeding and sweating men collapse in panting, groaning heaps. The* SOLDIERS *sprawl down beside them. The* CAPTAIN *springs off the wagon*]

Phoo! This shade is grateful.

[*He looks at the tree—then in an awed tone*]

This must be the Holy Tree which was once the staff of Mahomet and, passing down through generations, was buried in the grave of Abu Abdallah where it struck root and grew by the will of Allah into this tree.

[*He makes obeisance and prays to the tree as do the* SOLDIERS. *He gets up and takes a gulp of water—then, looking around, notices the three merchants—with startled surprise, drawing his sword*]

Ho! What are you? Get up!

[*They do so frightenedly. He stares at them and laughs coarsely with relief*]

By all the demons, you startled me! But you traders are like fleas, one finds you everywhere!

[*Then with a scowl*]

Three dogs of unbelievers, too!

[*Sharply*]

Give an account of yourselves!

BUDDHIST

I was proceeding westward on a business venture, good sir.

MAGIAN

And I to the northward.

CHRISTIAN

And I to the court of Ghazan Khan to present this letter to Queen Kukachin. But I hear she's dead.

[*He hands him the letter but the* CAPTAIN *backs away superstitiously*]

CAPTAIN

Allah forbid I touch what belongs to a corpse.

[*Then with forced laughter*]

You need not journey farther. She is in there!

[*His voice has dropped, he points toward the coffin. The others stare at it, dumbfounded and awed. The* CAPTAIN *goes on dryly*]

You cannot cheat her now, Christian!

[*Then lowering his voice as if afraid he will be overheard*]

And yet, to look at her face you would think her only sleeping.

CHRISTIAN

[*Astonished*]

What? Can you look at her?

CAPTAIN

Her coffin is glass. Her body was anointed by Egyptians so that she preserves the appearance of life. This was done by command of her grandfather Kublai, the Great Kaan. She is being taken home to Cathay for burial—and under penalty of torture I must transport her over the first stage by dark tonight!

[*Suddenly lamenting*]

But Allah afflicted me! When I reached the last village with my camels foundering, I found the accursed villagers had driven off their beasts to escape requisition. But the dogs could not balk me. I hitched them to the pole instead.

[*He looks at the moaning figures with a cruel appraising eye*]

But will they last till night? Hi, there! Water to revive them!

[*The soldiers carry around jugs of water which the panting men reach out for avidly, then sink back. But three of the more elderly men are too spent to move*]

CHRISTIAN

[*Timorously—anxious to change the subject*]

Was the Queen very beautiful?

CAPTAIN

[*With bravado*]

Would you care to see? You had a letter to her. It can do no harm—and it is a very great wonder!

CHRISTIAN

[*Reassuringly, because he is now extremely curious*]

Dead Queens in the West usually lie in state.

CAPTAIN

You pull back the cloth then, since that is your custom.

[*The* CHRISTIAN *goes to the wagon and gingerly pulls back the pall from the head of the coffin—then retreats with an exclamation as* KUKACHIN'S *face, that of a beautiful Tartar princess of twenty-three, is revealed inside the glass. Her calm expression seems to glow with the intense peace of a life beyond death, the eyes are shut as if she were asleep. The men stare fascinatedly*]

CHRISTIAN

[*After a pause—crossing himself awedly*]

Are you certain she's dead?

CAPTAIN

[*In an awed whisper*]

In the palace I commanded the company who guarded her coffin at night. I could not take my eyes from her face. It seemed that any moment she must awake and speak!

[*While they have been speaking, unnoticed by them, it has grown dark. An unearthly glow, like a halo, lights up the face of* KUKACHIN. *From the branches of the tree*

comes a sound of sweet sad music as if the leaves were tiny harps strummed by the wind. The face of KUKACHIN *becomes more and more living. Finally her lips part and her eyes open to look up at the tree*]

CAPTAIN

[*Kneeling down to pray*]
Allah, be pitiful!

BUDDHIST

Buddha, protect Thy servant!

MAGIAN

Mithra, All-Powerful One!

CHRISTIAN

Jesus, have mercy!

[*A voice which is* KUKACHIN'S *and yet more musical than a human voice, comes from the coffin as her lips are seen to move*]

KUKACHIN

Say this, I loved and died. Now I am love, and live. And living, have forgotten. And loving, can forgive.

[*Here her lips part in a smile of beautiful pity*]
Say this for me in Venice!

[*A sound of tender laughter, of an intoxicating, supernatural gaiety, comes from her lips and is taken up in chorus in the branches of the tree as if every harp-leaf were laughing in music with her. The laughter recedes heavenward and dies as the halo of light about her face fades and noonday rushes back in a blaze of baking plain. Everyone is prostrate, the harnessed wretches in the exhausted attitudes of sleep, the others visibly trembling with superstitious horror*]

CHRISTIAN

[*The first to recover—bewilderedly*]

Venice! It must have been a message she wished me to take back to Marco Polo!

CAPTAIN

[*His terror going and rage taking its place, leaps to his feet*]

It was the voice of some Christian devil you summoned! It bewitched even me until Allah drove it back to hell!

[*He draws his sword*]

Cover her face, accursed sorcerer!

CHRISTIAN

[*Pulls the covering over the head of the coffin with indecent haste*]

I pledge you my word, good Captain—!

CAPTAIN

[*To his* SOLDIERS]

Attention! Kick them up! We must get away from here!

[*With blows and kicks the* SOLDIERS *get their human beasts to their feet. There are groans and curses and cries of pain. But three cannot be roused. The* CAPTAIN *growls savagely at the* CHRISTIAN *to keep up his courage.*

Pig of an infidel!

[*Then glaring at the* BUDDHIST *and* MAGIAN]

You too! You were in league with him!

[*He grips his sword*]

ALL THREE

[*Kneeling—pitiably*]

Mercy! Spare us!

A CORPORAL

[*Comes up and salutes*]

We cannot get three of them up, sir.

CAPTAIN

[*Raging*]

Lash them!

CORPORAL

They are dead, sir.

CAPTAIN

[*Glumly*]

Oh.

[*Then an idea comes—with cruel satisfaction*]

Three, did you say? That is fortunate. Allah has provided! Cut them out and put these in their places!

[*At a sign, the* SOLDIERS *fall upon the three merchants, strip off their upper clothes, untie the dead men, and hitch them in their places. All the time the three set up miserable screams of protest, punctuated by the blows and kicks they receive. The others look on with exhausted indifference*]

CHRISTIAN

[*Making himself heard above the tumult*]

My letter! It was to the Queen! When Polo Brothers hear of this outrage they'll get the Kaan to flay you alive!

CAPTAIN

[*Taken aback a moment—then craftily*]

Show me your letter again!

CHRISTIAN

[*Holding it out with frantic eagerness*]

Here! Now set me free!

CAPTAIN

[*Takes it and calmly tears it up*]

I cannot read but I think you are lying. At any rate, now you have no letter!

[*The* CHRISTIAN *sets up a wailing cry and receives a blow. The* CAPTAIN *and* CORPORALS *spring up on the wagon*]

And now forward march!

[*With a great cracking of whips and shouts of pain the wagon is pulled swiftly away. On the ground under the sacred tree three bodies lie in crumpled heaps. The same sweet sad music comes from the tree again as if its spirit were playing on the leaves a last lamenting farewell to the dead* PRINCESS. *It rises softly and as softly dies away until it is nothing but a faint sound of wind rustling the leaves.*

CURTAIN

ACT ONE

ACT ONE

Scene One

Scene: *Twenty-three years earlier. A fresh boy's voice is heard singing a love song in a subdued tone. The light slowly reveals the exterior of* Donata's *home on a canal, Venice.* Marco Polo, *a boy of fifteen, youthfully handsome and well made, is standing in a gondola beneath a barred window of the house, a guitar over his shoulder. The song finished, he waits anxiously. A hand is thrust out to him through the bars. He kisses it passionately. It is hurriedly withdrawn.* Donata's *face appears pressed against the bars. She is a girl of twelve, her face pale and pretty in the moonlight.*

DONATA

[*Coyly and tenderly*]
You mustn't, Mark.

MARCO

There's no harm in that—just kissing your hand!

DONATA

[*Demurely*]
It's a sin, I'm sure of it.

MARCO

[*With a quick movement of his own hand, captures hers through the bars*]

Then I'll have to steal it, and that's a worse sin.

[*He pulls her willing hand down toward his lips*]

DONATA

You're hurting my fingers.

MARCO

[*Boldly now*]

Then I know how to cure them.

[*He kisses them one by one*]

There!

DONATA

[*Tenderly*]

You silly boy! Why do you do that?

MARCO

[*Very seriously*]

You know, Donata.

DONATA

Know what?

[*Softly*]

Go on and tell me, Mark.

MARCO

[*Blurts out gruffly*]

I love you, that's what! I've loved you ever since I can remember. And you've known it right along, too, so there's no good pretending.

DONATA

[*Softly*]

I wasn't sure.

MARCO

[*Recklessly*]

And how about you? Do you love me? You've got to answer me that!

DONATA

You know—without my saying it.

MARCO

Please say it!

DONATA

[*In a whisper*]

I love you. There, silly!

MARCO

And you'll promise to marry me when I come back?

DONATA

Yes, but you'll have to ask my parents.

MARCO

[*Easily*]

Don't worry about them. They'll be glad, and my folks, too. It'll bring the two firms into closer contact.

DONATA

[*Practically*]

Yes, I think so, too.

[*A pause. Songs and music come from near and far-off in the night about them.* MARCO *has gained possession of her two hands now and his face is closer to the bars of her window*]

MARCO

[*With a sigh*]

It's beautiful tonight. I wish I didn't have to go away.

DONATA

I wish, too! Do you really have to?

MARCO

Yes. And I want to, too—all but leaving you. I want to travel and see the world and all the different people, and get to know

their habits and needs from first-hand knowledge. You've got to do that if you want to become really big and important. That's what Father says—and Uncle.

DONATA

But won't this trip so very far away be full of danger?

MARCO

[*Boastfully*]

I can take care of myself. Uncle says taking chances—*necessary* chances, of course—is the best schooling for a real merchant; and Father has a saying that where there's nothing risked, there's nothing gained. And they ought to know, oughtn't they, after spending nine years at the court of the Great Kaan and traveling there and back?

DONATA

Is that where you're going?

MARCO

Yes. He's the richest king in the world and Uncle and Father are personal friends of his. They did a lot of work for him. I'll be on the right side of him from the start, and Father and Uncle both say there's millions to be made in his service if you're not afraid of work and keep awake to opportunity.

DONATA

I'm sure you'll succeed. But I wish you weren't going for so long.

MARCO

I'll miss you as much as you miss me.

[*Huskily*]

I hate to leave you, Donata—but I've got to make my own way—so we can marry—

DONATA

[*Hurriedly*]

Yes—of course—only come back as soon as you can.

MARCO

But you'll wait, won't you, no matter how long?

DONATA

[*Solemnly*]

Yes, I swear to, Mark.

MARCO

And I swear by God I'll come back and marry you, and I'll always be true and never forget or do anything—

DONATA

[*Startled by a noise from within*]

Ssshh! There's someone moving inside. You'll have to go. Here.

[*She hands him a locket*]

It's a medallion of me painted by an artist who owed Father for spices and couldn't pay with money. Will you keep looking at this all the time you're away and never forget me?

MARCO

[*Kissing it passionately*]

Every day!

DONATA

And you'll write me?

MARCO

I promise. Every chance I get.

DONATA

[*Hesitatingly*]

Will you write me—a poem? I won't care how short it is if it's only a poem.

MARCO

I'll try, Donata. I'll do my best.

DONATA

I'll just love it to death, Mark!

[*Startledly*]

Ssshh! I hear it again. It must be Father. I've got to sneak back.

MARCO

[*Desperately*]

Won't you kiss me—let me really kiss you—just once—for good-bye?

DONATA

I mustn't.

MARCO

Just once—when I'm going so far away?

[*Desperately*]

I—I—I'll die if you don't!

DONATA

Well—just once.

[*The moonlight fades into darkness as their lips meet. Then from the darkness are their voices heard in hushed tones*]

Good-bye, Mark.

MARCO

Good-bye, Donata.

[*The sentimental singing voices and guitars are heard from all corners of the night in celebration of love. The sound gradually grows fainter and fainter, receding into the distance, as if* Marco *were already leaving Venice behind him*]

DARKNESS

ACT ONE

Scene Two

Scene: *Six months later. The tolling of a church bell is first heard. Then the interior of the Papal Legate's palace at Acre is revealed—a combination of church and government building.*

The Legate, Tedaldo, *a man of sixty with a strong, intelligent face, is seated on a sort of throne placed against the rear wall. On his right, stands a warrior noble, a* Knight-Crusader, *in full armor, leaning on his sword. On his left, a* Dominican Monk, *his adviser. On the left of the room is an altar with candles burning. On the right, an open portal with a sentry pacing up and down, spear in hand.*

The two elder Polos, Nicolo *and* Maffeo, *stand in attitudes of patient servility before the throne.* Marco's *father,* Nicolo, *is a small thin middle-aged man, with a dry, shrewd face.* Maffeo, Marco's *uncle, is around the same age, but he is tall and stout with a round, jovial face and small, cunning eyes. There is a strong general resemblance between both of them and* Marco. Marco *is sitting on a stool in the foreground, his body all screwed up into an awkward intensity, striving with all his might to compose a poem to* Donata, *but constantly distracted in spite of himself.*

TEDALDO

[*Bored but tolerantly*]

What can I do except advise you to be patient? I'm sure the Conclave of Cardinals must soon select a Pope.

NICOLO

Two years in session!

[*Then suddenly—consoled*]

Well, it's a new world's record, anyway.

MAFFEO

[*Shaking his head*]

This uncertainty is bad for trade.

TEDALDO

[*With a bored yawn*]

No doubt.

[*Then rather impatiently*]

Then, when your business so evidently calls you to the East, why delay longer? Why not simply explain to the Great Kaan, Kublai, that there was no Pope to whom you could deliver his message?

NICOLO

He mightn't understand. His instructions to us were pretty emphatic.

MAFFEO

To request the Pope to send him a hundred wise men of the West—

TEDALDO

[*Dryly*]

This Kublai is an optimist!

MAFFEO

—to argue with his Buddhists and Taoists and Confucians which religion in the world is best.

MONK

[*Outraged*]

Impudent ignoramus! Does he imagine the Church would stoop to such bickering?

TEDALDO

[*With a weary smile*]

I begin to think Kublai is a humorist, too.

MAFFEO

[*Craftily*]

It'd pay to convert him. He's the richest king in the world. He rules over millions of subjects, his empire covers millions of square miles of great undeveloped natural resources, his personal wealth in cash and jewels and goods alone easily runs into millions of millions!

MARCO

[*Stares at his uncle—then mutters fascinatedly*]

Millions!

[*Then, shaking away this interruption, bends to his writing again*]

TEDALDO

[*Wearily*]

I am bored with your millions, Messrs. Polo. Even if they are true, it is too much effort to conceive them.

[*They bow humbly and retire backward. His eyes following them listlessly* TEDALDO *sees* MARCO, *who at this moment is scratching himself, twisting and turning his legs and feet, tearing his hair in a perfect frenzy of balked inspiration.* TEDALDO *smiles and addresses him in an affectionate, humorous tone*]

God's mercy on you, Master Marco! Are you suddenly pos-

sessed by a devil—or is it only these infernal Mahometan fleas the Almighty sends us for our sins?

MARCO

[*Coming out of his fit—sheepishly*]

I'm only writing something.

MAFFEO

Mark is surprisingly quick at figures.

NICOLO

But still heedless. A dreamer!

[*To* MARCO, *with a condescending paternal air*]

What are you writing, son?

[*He and* MAFFEO *draw near* MARCO]

MARCO

[*More confused*]

Nothing, sir—just—something.

[*He tries to hide it*]

MAFFEO

Why are you so mysterious? Come, let's see.

MARCO

No—please, Uncle.

MAFFEO

[*With a sudden cunning motion, he snatches it from* MARCO'S *hand, glances at it and bursts into laughter*]

Look, Nicolo, look!

MARCO

[*Rebelliously*]

Give that back!

NICOLO

[*Sternly*]

Behave yourself, Mark!

[*To* MAFFEO]

What is it?

MAFFEO

See for yourself.

[*He hands it to him*]

Did you know you'd hatched a nightingale?

[*He laughs coarsely*]

[NICOLO *reads, a scornful grin coming to his lips*]

TEDALDO

Surely it cannot be a song he has written?

NICOLO

[*Going to him—laughing*]

A rhyme! A love poem, no less!

TEDALDO

[*Severely, as he takes the poem*]

Do not mock at him! Rather be grateful if a thistle can bring forth figs.

[MARCO *remains sullenly apart, shamefaced and angry, his fists clenched.* TEDALDO *reads—frowns—laughs—then smilingly to* NICOLO]

Your fear that this is a poem is—humn—exaggerated!

[*He reads amusedly as* MARCO *squirms*]

"You are lovely as the gold in the sun
Your skin is like silver in the moon
Your eyes are black pearls I have won.
I kiss your ruby lips and you swoon,
Smiling your thanks as I promise you
A large fortune if you will be true,
While I am away earning gold

And silver so when we are old
I will have a million to my credit
And in the meantime can easily afford
A big wedding that will do us credit
And start having children, bless the Lord!"

[*There is a roar of laughter in which* TEDALDO *joins.* MARCO *looks about for a hole into which to crawl.* TEDALDO *addresses him amusedly but with kindness*]

Come, Marco. Here is your poem. Your lady is a bit too mineral, your heaven of love a trifle monetary—but, never mind, you will be happier as a Polo than as a poet. Here.

[*He gives it to* MARCO. *The latter fiercely crumples it up and throws it on the floor and stamps on it*]

NICOLO

[*Approvingly*]

Sensibly done, my boy.

TEDALDO

[*Looking searchingly at* MARCO'S *face—gently*]

Perhaps I was too critical. Your poem had merits of its own. I am sure it would touch your lady's heart.

MARCO

[*With a great bluster of manliness*]

Oh, I don't mind your making fun. I can take a joke. It *was* silly. Poetry's all stupid, anyway. I was only trying it for fun, to see if I could. You won't catch me ever being such a fool again!

MONK

[*As a noise of shouting comes toward them*]

Ssstt! What's that?

[*The* KNIGHT *hurries to the portal*]

KNIGHT

Someone is running here, and a crowd behind. I hear them shouting "Pope."

MONK

Then the Conclave has chosen!

POLOS

[*Joyfully*]

At last!

[*The cries of many voices. The* SENTINEL *and* KNIGHT *admit the* MESSENGER *but push back the others*]

MESSENGER

[*Exhausted—falls on his knees before* TEDALDO, *holding out a sealed paper*]

I come from the Conclave. You were chosen. Your Holiness—

[*He falls fainting. The crowds cheer and sweep in*]

TEDALDO

[*Rising—pale and trembling*]

What does he say?

MONK

[*Has picked up the document—joyfully*]

See! The official seal! You are the Pope!

[*He kneels humbly*]

Your Holiness, let me be the first—

[*He kisses* TEDALDO'S *hand. All are kneeling now, their heads bowed. The bells of the churches begin to ring*]

TEDALDO

[*Raising his hands to heaven—dazedly*]

Lord, I am not worthy!

[*Then to those about him—tremblingly*]

Leave me. I must pray to God for strength—for guidance!

CROWD

[*In a clamor*]

Your blessing!

[TEDALDO, *with a simple dignity and power, blesses them. They back out slowly, the* MONK *and* KNIGHT *last. The* POLOS *group together in the foreground, holding a whispered conference.* TEDALDO *kneels before the altar*]

MAFFEO

Now that he's the Pope, if we could get an answer from him, we could start right away.

NICOLO

We couldn't hope for better weather.

MAFFEO

He seems to have taken a fancy to Mark. You speak to him, Mark.

MARCO

[*Unwillingly*]

He's praying.

MAFFEO

He'll have time enough for that, but with us time is money.

[*Giving the unwilling* MARCO *a push*]

This will test your nerve, Mark! Don't shirk!

MARCO

[*Gritting his teeth*]

All right. I'll show you I'm not scared!

[*He advances boldly toward the altar, stands there for a moment awkwardly as* TEDALDO *remains oblivious—then he falls on his knees—humbly but insistently*]

Your Holiness. Forgive me, Your Holiness—

TEDALDO

[*Turns to him and springs to his feet—imperiously*]

I wish to be alone!

[*Then as* MARCO *is shrinking back—more kindly*]

Well, what is it? I owe you a recompense, perhaps—for an injury.

MARCO

[*Stammeringly*]

Your Holiness—if you could give us some answer to deliver to the Great Kaan—we could start now—with such favorable weather—

TEDALDO

[*Amused in spite of himself*]

On the last day one of your seed will interrupt Gabriel to sell him another trumpet!

[*Then sardonically to the elder* POLOS]

I have no hundred wise men—nor one! Tell the Great Kaan he must have been imposed upon by your patriotic lies, or he could never make such a request.

POLOS

[*Terrified*]

But, Your Holiness, we dare not repeat— He'd have us killed!

TEDALDO

I will send him a monk or two. That is quite sufficient to convert a Tartar barbarian!

MAFFEO

But, Your Holiness, he's not a barbarian! Why, every plate on his table is solid gold!

TEDALDO

[*Smiling*]

And has he millions of plates, too?

[*Then with a sudden whimsicality*]

But if the monks fail, Master Marco can be my missionary. Let him set an example of virtuous Western manhood amid all the levities of paganism, shun the frailty of poetry, have a million to his credit, as he so beautifully phrased it, and I will wager a million of something or other myself that the Kaan will soon be driven to seek spiritual salvation somewhere! Mark my words, Marco will be worth a million wise men—in the cause of wisdom!

[*He laughs gaily, raising his hand over* MARCO'S *head*]

Go with my blessing! But what need have you for a blessing? You were born with success in your pocket!

[*With a last gesture he turns, going quickly out the door in rear*]

MAFFEO

[*As he goes—approvingly*]

Mark is making a good impression already!

NICOLO

Well, he's got a head on him!

MARCO

[*Beginning to swell out a bit matter-of-factly*]

Never mind about me. When do we start?

POLOS

[*Hurriedly*]

At once. Let's go and pack.

[*They go out left*]

Come, Mark! Hurry!

MARCO

I'm coming.

[*He waits, looks after them, picks up the crumpled poem, starts to hide it in his jacket, stops, mutters with brave self-contempt*]

Aw! You damn fool!

[*He throws the poem down again, starts to go, hesitates, suddenly turns back, picks it up, crams it into his doublet and runs wildly out the door. The scene fades into darkness. For a time the church bells, which have never ceased ringing, are heard acclaiming the new Pope; but the* Polos *proceed speedily on their journey and the sound is soon left behind them*]

DARKNESS

ACT ONE

Scene Three

Scene: *Light comes, gradually revealing the scene. In the rear is the front of a Mahometan mosque. Before the mosque, is a throne on which sits a Mahometan ruler. On the right, the inevitable warrior—on his left, the inevitable priest—the two defenders of the State. At the ruler's feet his wives crouch like slaves. Everything is jeweled, high-colored, gorgeous in this background. Squatted against the side walls, forming a sort of semi-circle with the throne at center, counting from left to right consecutively, are a mother nursing a baby, two children playing a game, a young girl and a young man in a loving embrace, a middle-aged couple, an aged couple, a coffin. All these Mahometan figures remain motionless. Only their eyes move, staring fixedly but indifferently at the* Polos, *who are standing at center.* Marco *is carrying in each hand bags which curiously resemble modern sample cases. He sets these down and gazes around with a bewildered awe.*

NICOLO

[*Turning on him—genially*]

Well, son, here we are in Islam.

MARCO

[*Round-eyed*]

A man told me that Noah's Ark is still somewhere around here on top of a mountain.

[*Eagerly*]

And he proved it to me, too. Look!

[*He shows them a piece of wood*]

He broke this off of the Ark. See, it's got Noah's initials on it!

MAFFEO

[*Grimly*]

How much did you pay him for it?

MARCO

Ten soldi in silver.

NICOLO

[*Dashing it out of* MARCO'S *hand—bitterly*)

Muttonhead! Do you suppose Almighty God would allow infidels to cut up Noah's Ark into souvenirs to sell to Christians?

MAFFEO

[*Teasingly*]

Your son and your money are soon parted, Brother.

[*Then placatingly*]

But he's only a boy. He'll learn. And before we go farther, Nicolo, we better read him from the notes we made on our last trip all there is to remember about this corner of the world.

NICOLO

[*They take out note-books closely resembling a modern business man's date-book and read*]

We're now passing through Kingdoms where they worship Mahomet.

MAFFEO

There's one kingdom called Musul and in it a district of Baku where there's a great fountain of oil. There's a growing demand for it.

[*Then speaking*]

Make a mental note of that.

MARCO

Yes, sir.

NICOLO

Merchants make great profits. The people are simple creatures. It's very cold in winter. The women wear cotton drawers. This they do to look large in the hips, for the men think that a great beauty.

[*The two* MAHOMETAN MERCHANTS *enter from the left.* MAFFEO *recognizes them immediately—in a swift aside to his brother*]

MAFFEO

There's those damned Ali brothers. They'll cut under our prices with their cheap junk as usual.

[*The* ALI *brothers have seen the* POLOS *and a whispered aside, evidently of the same nature, passes between them. Then simultaneously the two firms advance to meet each other putting on expressions of the utmost cordiality*]

Well, well. You folks are a welcome sight!

ONE ALI

My dear, dear friends! Praise be to Allah!

[*They embrace*]

MAFFEO

[*With a cunning smirk*]

Selling a big bill of goods hereabouts, I'll wager, you old rascals?

THE OLDER ALI

[*Airily*]

My dear friend, don't speak of business. But you, you are on a venture to the court of the Great Kaan, we hear?

MAFFEO

What lies get around! Nothing in it—absolutely nothing!

NICOLO

For heaven's sake, let's not talk business! Let's have a nice friendly chat.

[*The four squat together in a circle*]

MAFFEO

[*With a wink*]

I'll tell you a good one an Armenian doily-dealer told me down in Bagdad.

[*They all bend their heads toward him with expectant grins. He looks around—then begins in a cautious lowered tone*]

Well, there was an old Jew named Ikey and he married a young girl named Rebecca—

[*He goes on telling the rest of the story with much exaggerated Jewish pantomime but in a voice too low to be heard. In the meantime,* MARCO *has slipped off, full of curiosity and wonder, to look at this strange life. He goes first to the left, stops before the mother and baby, smiles down at it uncertainly, then bends down to take hold of its hand*]

MARCO

Hello!

[*Then to the mother*]

He's fat as butter!

[*Both remain silent and motionless, staring at him from a great distance with indifferent calm.* MARCO *is rebuffed, grows embarrassed, turns away to the children, who, frozen in the midst of their game of jackstraws, are looking at him.* MARCO *adopts a lofty condescending air*]

Humh! Do you still play that game here? I remember it—when I was a kid.

[*They stare silently. He mutters disgustedly*]

Thickheads!

[*And turns to the lovers who with their arms about each other, cheek to cheek, stare at him. He looks at them, fascinated and stirred, and murmurs enviously*]

She's pretty. I suppose they're engaged—like Donata and me.

[*He fumbles and pulls out the locket which is hung around his neck on a ribbon*]

Donata's prettier.

[*Then embarrassedly, he holds it out for them to see*]

Don't you think she's pretty? She and I are going to be married some day.

[*They do not look except into his eyes. He turns away, hurt and angry*]

Go to the devil, you infidels!

[*He stuffs the locket back—stops before the throne—tries to stare insolently at the king but, awed in spite of himself, makes a grudging bow and passes on, stops before*

the family group, sneers and passes on, stops before the old couple and cannot restrain his curiosity]

Would you tell me how old you are?

[*He passes on, rebuffed again, stops fascinatedly before the coffin, leans out and touches it with defiant daring, shudders superstitiously and shrinks away, going to the merchant group who are roaring with laughter as* MAFFEO *ends his story*]

THE OLDER ALI

[*To* NICOLO]

Your son?

NICOLO

Yes, and a chip of the old block.

THE OLDER ALI

Will he follow in your footsteps?

NICOLO

[*Jocosely*]

Yes, and you better look out then! He's as keen as a hawk already.

THE OLDER ALI

[*With a trace of a biting smile*]

He greatly resembles a youth I saw back on the road buying a piece of Noah's Ark from a wayside sharper.

MAFFEO

[*Hastily coming to the rescue as* NICOLO *cannot hide his chagrin—boastfully*]

It wasn't Mark. Mark would have sold him the lions of St. Mark's for good mousers!

[*The* PROSTITUTE *enters from the right. She is painted,*

half-naked, alluring in a brazen, sensual way. She smiles at MARCO *enticingly*]

MARCO

[*With a gasp*]

Look! Who's that?

[*They all turn, and, recognizing her, laugh with coarse familiarity*]

MAFFEO

[*Jokingly*]

So here you are again. You're like a bad coin—always turning up.

PROSTITUTE

[*Smiling*]

Shut up. You can bet it isn't old fools like you that turn me.

NICOLO

[*With a lecherous grin at her*]

No? But it's the old who have the money.

PROSTITUTE

Money isn't everything, not always. Now I wouldn't ask money from him.

[*She points to* MARCO]

NICOLO

[*Crossly and jealously*]

Leave him alone, you filth!

MAFFEO

[*Broad-mindedly*]

Come, come, Nicolo. Let the boy have his fling.

PROSTITUTE

[*Her eyes on* MARCO]

Hello, Handsome.

MARCO

[*Bewilderedly*]

You've learned our language?

PROSTITUTE

I sell to all nations.

MARCO

What do you sell?

PROSTITUTE

[*Mockingly*]

A precious jewel. Myself.

[*Then desirously*]

But for you I'm a gift.

[*Putting her hands on his shoulders and lifting her lips*]

Why don't you kiss me?

MARCO

[*Terribly confused—strugglingly*]

I—I don't know—I mean, I'm sorry but—you see I promised someone I'd never—

[*Suddenly freeing himself—frightenedly*]

Leave go! I don't want your kisses.

[*A roar of coarse taunting laughter from the men.* MARCO *runs away, off Left*]

NICOLO

[*Between his teeth*]

What a dolt!

MAFFEO

[*Slapping the* PROSTITUTE *on the bare shoulder*]

Better luck next time. He'll learn!

PROSTITUTE

[*Trying to hide her pique—forcing a cynical smile*]

Oh, yes, but I won't be a gift then. I'll make him pay, just to show him!

[*She laughs harshly and goes out Left. A pause. All four squat again in silence*]

THE OLDER ALI

[*Suddenly*]

Many wonders have come to pass in these regions. They relate that in old times three kings from this country went to worship a Prophet that was born and they carried with them three manner of offerings—Gold and Frankincense and Myrrh—and when they had come to the place where the Child was born, they marveled and knelt before him.

MAFFEO

That's written in the Bible. The child was Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[*He blesses himself,* NICOLO *does likewise*]

THE OLDER ALI

Your Jesus was a great prophet.

NICOLO

[*Defiantly*]

He was the Son of God!

BOTH ALIS

[*Stubbornly*]

There is no God but Allah!

[*A strained pause. A dervish of the desert runs in shrieking and begins to whirl. No one is surprised except the two* POLOS *who get up to gape at him with the thrilled appreciation inspired by a freak in a sideshow.* MARCO *comes back and joins them*]

MAFFEO

[*With appreciation*]

If we had him in Venice we could make a mint of money exhibiting him.

[NICOLO *nods*]

MARCO

I'll have to write Donata all about this.

[*Wonderingly*]

Is he crazy?

MAFFEO

[*In a low aside to him*]

My boy, all Mahometans are crazy. That's the only charitable way to look at it.

[*Suddenly the call to prayer sounds from Muezzins in the minarets of the mosque. The* DERVISH *falls on his face. Everyone sinks into the attitude of prayer except the* POLOS *who stand embarrassedly, not knowing what to do*]

MARCO

Are they praying?

NICOLO

Yes, they call it that. Much good it does them!

MAFFEO

Ssshh! Come! This is a good time to move on again. Marco! Wake up!

[*They go quickly out Right,* MARCO *following with the sample cases. The scene fades quickly into darkness as the call of the Muezzins is heard again*]

DARKNESS

ACT ONE

Scene Four

Scene: *The slowly-rising light reveals an Indian snake-charmer squatted on his haunches at center. A snake is starting to crawl from the basket in front of him, swaying its head to the thin, shrill whine of a gourd. Otherwise, the scene, in the placing of its people and the characters and types represented, is the exact duplicate of the last except that here the locale is Indian. The background for the ruler's throne is now a Buddhist temple instead of a mosque. The motionless staring figures are all Indians. Looming directly above and in back of the ruler's throne is an immense Buddha. The* Polos *stand at center as before,* Marco *still lugging the sample cases. He is seventeen now. Some of the freshness of youth has worn off. They stare at the snake-charmer, the two older men cynically.* Marco *gasps with enthralled horror.*

MARCO

Look at that deadly snake!

MAFFEO

[*Cynically*]

He's a fake, like everything else here. His fangs have been pulled out.

MARCO

[*Disillusioned*]

Oh!

[*He turns away. The snake-charmer glares at them, stops playing, pushes his snake back into the box and carries it off, after spitting on the ground at their feet with angry disgust.* MARCO *sits on one of the cases and glances about with a forced scorn; looks finally at the Buddha—in a smart-Aleck tone*]

So that is Buddha!

NICOLO

[*Begins to read from his note-book*]

These people are idolaters. The climate is so hot if you put an egg in their rivers it will be boiled.

MAFFEO

[*Taking up the reading from his book in the same tone*]

The merchants make great profits. Ginger, pepper, and indigo. Largest sheep in the world. Diamonds of great size. The Kings have five hundred wives apiece.

MARCO

[*Disgustedly*]

It's too darn hot here!

MAFFEO

[*Warningly*]

Sshhh! Don't let the natives hear you. Remember any climate is healthy where trade is brisk.

MARCO

[*Walks sullenly off to left. At the same moment two merchants, this time Buddhists, come in. The same interplay goes on with them as with the* ALI BROTHERS *in the previous scene, only this time it is all done in pantomime until the loud laughter at the end of* MAFFEO'S *story. As* MAFFEO *tells the story,* MARCO *is looking at*

the people but this time he assumes the casual, indifferent attitude of the worldly-wise. He makes a silly gesture to attract the baby's attention, passes by the two children with only a contemptuous glance, but stops and stares impudently at the lovers—finally spits with exaggerated scorn]

Where do you think you are—home with the light out? Why don't you charge admission?

[*He stalks on—pauses before the middle-aged couple who have a bowl of rice between them—in astonishment as though this evidence of a humanity common with his struck him as strange*]

Real rice!

[*He ignores the throne, passes quickly by the old people with a glance of aversion and very obviously averts his head from the coffin. As he returns to the group at center,* MAFFEO *has just finished his story. There is a roar of laughter*]

MARCO

[*Grinning eagerly*]

What was it, Uncle?

MAFFEO

[*Grinning teasingly*]

You're too young.

MARCO

[*Boastfully*]

Is that so?

NICOLO

[*Severely*]

Mark!

[*The* PROSTITUTE, *the same but now in Indian garb, has entered from Left and comes up behind* MARCO]

PROSTITUTE

A chip of the old block, Nicolo!

NICOLO

[*Angrily*]

You again!

MARCO

[*Pleased to see her—embarrassedly*]

Why, hello.

PROSTITUTE

[*Cynically*]

I knew you'd want to see me.

[*She raises her lips*]

Will you kiss me now?

[*As he hesitates*]

Forget your promise. You know you want to.

MAFFEO

[*Grinning*]

There's no spirit in the youngsters nowadays. I'll bet he won't.

PROSTITUTE

[*Her eyes on* MARCO'S]

How much will you bet?

MAFFEO

Ten—

[MARCO *suddenly kisses her*]

PROSTITUTE

[*Turning to* MAFFEO]

I win, Uncle.

MARCO

[*With a grin*]

No. I kissed you before he said ten what.

MAFFEO

That's right! Good boy, Mark!

PROSTITUTE

[*Turning to* MARCO—*cynically*]

You're learning, aren't you? You're becoming shrewd even about kisses. You need only me now to make you into a real man—for ten pieces of gold.

MARCO

[*Genuinely overcome by a sudden shame*]

No, please.—I—I didn't mean it. It was only in fun.

PROSTITUTE

[*With a sure smile*]

Later, then—when we meet again.

[*She walks off Left*]

MARCO

[*Looks after her. As she evidently turns to look back at him, he waves his hand and grins—then abashed*]

She's pretty. It's too bad she's—what she is.

MAFFEO

Don't waste pity. Her kind are necessary evils. All of us are human.

[*A long pause*]

THE OLDER BUDDHIST MERCHANT

[*Suddenly*]

The Buddha taught that one's loving-kindness should embrace all forms of life, that one's compassion should suffer with the suffering, that one's sympathy should understand all things, and

last that one's judgment should regard all persons and things as of equal importance.

NICOLO

[*Harshly*]

Who was this Buddha?

THE OLDER BUDDHIST MERCHANT

The Incarnation of God.

NICOLO

You mean Jesus?

THE OLDER BUDDHIST MERCHANT

[*Unheedingly*]

He was immaculately conceived. The Light passed into the womb of Maya, and she bore a son who, when he came to manhood, renounced wife and child, riches and power, and went out as a beggar on the roads to seek the supreme enlightenment which would conquer birth and death; and at last he attained the wisdom where all desire has ended and experienced the heaven of peace, Nirvana. And when he died he became a God again.

[*The temple bells begin to ring in chorus. All except the* Polos *prostrate themselves before the Buddha*]

MARCO

[*To his uncle—in a whispered chuckle*]

Died and became a God? So that's what they believe about that stone statue, is it?

MAFFEO

They're all crazy, like the Mahometans. They're not responsible.

MARCO

[*Suddenly*]

I saw two of them with a bowl of rice—

MAFFEO

Oh, yes. They eat the same as we do.

[*Then abruptly*]

Come on! This is our chance to make a start. Don't forget our cases, Mark.

[*They go out Left followed by* MARCO *with the sample cases. The scene fades into darkness. The clamor of the temple bells slowly dies out in the distance*]

DARKNESS

ACT ONE

Scene Five

Scene: *From the darkness comes the sound of a small Tartar kettledrum, its beats marking the rhythm for a crooning, nasal voice, rising and falling in a wordless chant.*

The darkness gradually lifts. In the rear is a section of the Great Wall of China with an enormous shut gate. It is late afternoon, just before sunset. Immediately before the gate is a rude throne on which sits a Mongol ruler with warrior and sorcerer to right and left of him. At the sides are Mongol circular huts. The motionless figures sit before these. The Minstrel, *squatting at center, is the only one whose body moves. In the back of the throne and above it is a small idol made of felt and cloth. The clothes of the ruler and his court are of rich silk stuffs, lined with costly furs. The squatting figures of the people are clothed in rough robes.*

The Polos *stand at center,* Marco *still lugging the battered sample cases. He is now nearly eighteen, a brash, self-confident young man, assertive and talky. All the* Polos *are weary and their clothes shabby and travel-worn*]

MARCO

[*Setting down the bags with a thump and staring about with an appraising contempt*]

Welcome to that dear old Motherland, Mongolia!

MAFFEO

[*Wearily takes out his guide-book and begins to read in the monotone of a boring formula*]

Flocks—goats—horses—cattle. The women do all the buying and selling. Business is all in cattle and crops. In short, the people live like beasts.

NICOLO

[*Reading from his book*]

They have two Gods—a God of Heaven to whom they pray for health of mind, and a God of Earth who watches over their earthly goods. They pray to him also and do many other stupid things.

MARCO

[*Boredly*]

Well—let them!

[*He walks away and makes the circuit of the figures, but now he hardly glances at them. The* Two Tartar Merchants *enter and there is the same pantomime of greeting between them and the* Polos *as with the* Buddhist Merchants *in the previous scene.* Marco *joins them. It is apparent the whole company is extremely weary. They yawn and prepare to lie down*]

MAFFEO

We'll have time to steal a nap before they open the Gate.

MARCO

[*With an assertive importance*]

Just a moment! I've got a good one an idol-polisher told me in Tibet. This is the funniest story you ever heard! It seems an Irishman got drunk in Tangut and wandered into a temple

where he mistook one of the female statues for a real woman and—

[*He goes on, laughing and chuckling to himself, with endless comic pantomime. The two* TARTAR MERCHANTS *fall asleep.* NICOLO *stares at his son bitterly,* MAFFEO *with contemptuous pity. Finally* MARCO *finishes to his own uproarious amusement*]

NICOLO

[*Bitterly*]

Dolt!

MAFFEO

[*Mockingly. With a yawn*]

Youth will have its laugh!

[MARCO *stops open-mouthed and stares from one to the other*]

MARCO

[*Faintly*]

What's the matter?

NICOLO

[*Pettishly*]

Unless your jokes improve you'll never sell anything.

MAFFEO

I'll have to give Marco some lessons in how to tell a short story.

[*Warningly*]

And until I pronounce you graduated, mum's the word, understand! The people on the other side of that wall may look simple but they're not.

[*The* PROSTITUTE *enters dressed now as a Tartar. She comes and puts her hand on* MARCO'S *head*]

PROSTITUTE

What has this bad boy been doing now?

MAFFEO

He's getting too witty!

[*He rests his head on his arms and goes to sleep*]

PROSTITUTE

Shall I expect you again tonight?

MARCO

No. You've got all my money.

[*Suddenly gets to his feet and faces her—disgustedly*]

And I'm through with you, anyway.

PROSTITUTE

[*With a scornful smile*]

And I with you—now that you're a man.

[*She turns away*]

MARCO

[*Angrily*]

Listen here! Give me back what you stole! I know I had it on a ribbon around my neck last night and this morning it was gone.

[*Threateningly*]

Give it to me, you, or I'll make trouble!

PROSTITUTE

[*Takes a crumpled paper from her bosom*]

Do you mean this?

MARCO

[*Tries to snatch it*]

No!

PROSTITUTE

[*She unfolds it and reads*]

"I'll have a million to my credit
And in the meantime can easily afford
A big wedding that will do us credit
And start having children, Bless the Lord!"

[*She laughs*]

Are you a poet, too?

MARCO

[*Abashed and furious*]

I didn't write that.

PROSTITUTE

You're lying. You must have. Why deny it? Don't sell your soul for nothing. That's bad business.

[*She laughs, waving the poem in her upraised hand, staring mockingly*]

Going! Going! Gone!

[*She lets it fall and grinds it under her feet into the earth—laughing*]

Your soul! Dead and buried! You strong man!

[*She laughs*]

MARCO

[*Threateningly*]

Give me what was wrapped up in that, d'you hear!

PROSTITUTE

[*Scornfully. Takes the miniature from her bosom*]

You mean this? I was bringing it back to you. D'you think I want her ugly face around? Here!

[*She throws it at his feet. He leans down and picks it up, polishing it on his sleeve remorsefully. The* PROSTITUTE, *walking away, calls back over her shoulder*]

I kissed it so you'd remember my kiss whenever you kiss her!

[*She laughs.* MARCO *starts as if to run after her angrily. Suddenly a shout rises from the lips of all the Tartars,* the MINSTREL *and his drum become silent, and with one accord they raise their arms and eyes to the sky. Then the* MINSTREL *chants*]

MINSTREL

God of the Heaven, be in our souls!

[*Then they all prostrate themselves on the ground as he chants*]

God of the Earth, be in our bodies!

[*The Tartars sit up. The* MINSTREL *begins again his drum beat, crooning in a low monotone. The* POLOS *rise and stretch sleepily*]

MARCO

[*Inquisitively*]

Two Gods? Are they in one Person like our Holy Trinity?

MAFFEO

[*Shocked*]

Don't be impious! These are degraded pagans—or crazy, that's a more charitable way to—

[*From behind the wall comes the sound of martial Chinese music. The gate opens. The blinding glare of the setting sun floods in from beyond. A file of soldiers, accompanying a richly-dressed* COURT MESSENGER, *come through. He walks directly up to the* POLOS *and bows deeply*]

MESSENGER

The Great Kaan, Lord of the World, sent me—

[*He looks around*]

But where are the hundred wise men of the West?

NICOLO

[*Confusedly*]

We had two monks to start with—but they left us and went back.

MAFFEO

[*Warningly*]

Ssst!

MESSENGER

[*Indifferently*]

You will explain to the Kaan. I was ordered to arrange a welcome for them.

MAFFEO

[*Claps him on the back*]

Well, here we are—and hungry as hunters! So your welcome will be welcome, Brother.

[*The* MESSENGER *bows, starts back, the* POLOS *following him,* MAFFEO *calling*]

Get on the job, Mark!

[*They pass through the gate*]

MARCO

[*Wearily picks up the cases—then goading himself on*]

Giddap! Cathay or bust!

[*He struggles through the gate. For a second he is framed in it, outlined against the brilliant sky, tugging a sample case in each hand. Then the gate shuts, the light fades out. The drum beat and the chanting recede into the distance*]

DARKNESS

ACT ONE

Scene Six

Scene: *Music from full Chinese and Tartar bands crashes up to a tremendous blaring crescendo of drums, gongs, and the piercing shrilling of flutes. The light slowly comes to a pitch of blinding brightness. Then, as light and sound attain their highest point, there is a sudden dead silence. The scene is revealed as the Grand Throne Room in the palace of Kublai, the Great Kaan, in the city of Cambaluc, Cathay—an immense octagonal room, the lofty walls adorned in gold and silver. In the far rear wall, within a deep recess like the shrine of an idol, is the throne of the Great Kaan. It rises in three tiers, three steps to a tier. On golden cushions at the top* Kublai *sits dressed in his heavy gold robes of state. He is a man of sixty but still in the full prime of his powers, his face proud and noble, his expression tinged with an ironic humor and bitterness yet full of a sympathetic humanity. In his person are combined the conquering indomitable force of a descendant of Chinghiz with the humanizing culture of the conquered Chinese who have already begun to absorb their conquerors.*

On the level of the throne below Kublai are: on his right a Mongol warrior in full armor with shield and spear, his face grim, cruel and fierce. On his left Chu-Yin, *the Ca-*

thayan sage and adviser to the Kaan, a venerable old man with white hair, dressed in a simple black robe.

On the main floor, grouped close to the throne are: on the right, the sons of the Kaan. Farther away, the nobles and warriors of all degrees with their wives behind them. On the left, the wives and concubines of the Kaan, then the courtiers, officers, poets, scholars, etc.—all the non-military officials and hangers-on of government, with their women beside them.

MARCO *stands, a sample case in each hand, bewildered and dazzled, gawking about him on every side. His father and uncle, bowing, walk to the foot of the throne and kneel before the Kaan. They make frantic signals to* MARCO *to do likewise but he is too dazed to notice. All the people in the room are staring at him. The Kaan is looking at the two brothers with a stern air. An usher of the palace comes quietly to* MARCO *and makes violent gestures to him to kneel down.*

MARCO

[*Misunderstanding him—gratefully*]

Thank you, Brother.

[*He sits down on one of the sample cases to the gasping horror of all the Court. The Kaan is still looking frowningly at the two* POLOS *as he listens to the report of their Messenger escort. He does not notice. An outraged Chamberlain rushes over to* MARCO *and motions him to kneel down*]

MARCO

[*Bewilderedly*]

What's the trouble now?

KUBLAI

[*Dismissing the* MESSENGER, *having heard his report—addresses the* POLOS *coldly*]

I bid you welcome, Messrs. Polo. But where are the hundred wise men of the West who were to dispute with my wise men of the sacred teachings of Lao-Tseu and Confucius and the Buddha and Christ?

MAFFEO

[*Hurriedly*]

There was no Pope elected until just before—

NICOLO

And he had no wise men, anyway.

[*The Kaan now sees* MARCO *and a puzzled expression of interest comes over his face*]

KUBLAI

Is he with you?

NICOLO

[*Hesitantly*]

My son, Marco, your Majesty—still young and graceless.

KUBLAI

Come here, Marco Polo.

[MARCO *comes forward, trying feebly to assume a bold, confident air*]

MAFFEO

[*In a loud, furious aside*]

Kneel, you ass!

[MARCO *flounders to his knees*]

KUBLAI

[*With a smile*]

I bid you welcome, Master Marco.

MARCO

Thank you, sir—I mean, your Lordship—your—

[*Then suddenly*]

Before I forget—the Pope gave me a message for you, sir.

KUBLAI

[*Smiling*]

Are you his hundred wise men?

MARCO

[*Confidently*]

Well—almost. He sent me in their place. He said I'd be worth a million wise men to you.

NICOLO

[*Hastily*]

His Holiness meant that Marco, by leading an upright life—not neglecting the practical side, of course—might set an example that would illustrate, better than wise words, the flesh and blood product of our Christian civilization.

KUBLAI

[*With a quiet smile*]

I shall study this apotheosis with unwearied interest, I foresee it.

MARCO

[*Suddenly—with a confidential air*]

Wasn't that just a joke, your asking for the wise men? His Holiness thought you must have a sense of humor. Or that you must be an optimist.

KUBLAI

[*With a smile of appreciation*]

I am afraid your Holy Pope is a most unholy cynic.

[*Trying to solve a riddle in his own mind—musingly*]

Could he believe this youth possesses that thing called soul which the West dreams lives after death—and might reveal it to me?

[*Suddenly to* MARCO]

Have you an immortal soul?

MARCO

[*In surprise*]

Of course! Any fool knows that.

KUBLAI

[*Humbly*]

But I am not a fool. Can you prove it to me?

MARCO

Why, if you didn't have a soul, what would happen when you die?

KUBLAI

What, indeed?

MARCO

Why, nothing. You'd be dead—just like an animal.

KUBLAI

Your logic is irrefutable.

MARCO

Well, I'm not an animal, am I? That's certainly plain enough.

[*Then proudly*]

No, sir! I'm a man made by Almighty God in His Own Image for His greater glory!

KUBLAI

[*Staring at him for a long moment with appalled appreciation—ecstatically*]

So you are the Image of God! There is certainly something

about you, something complete and unanswerable—but wait—a test!

[*He claps his hands, pointing to* MARCO. *Soldiers with drawn swords leap forward and seize him, trussing up his hands behind his back*]

MAFFEO

[*Groveling*]

Mercy! He is only a boy!

NICOLO

[*Groveling*]

Mercy! He is only a fool!

KUBLAI

[*Sternly*]

Silence!

[*To* MARCO, *with inhuman calm*]

Since you possess eternal life, it can do you no harm to cut off your head.

[*He makes a sign to a soldier who flourishes his sword*]

MARCO

[*Trying to conceal his fear under a quavering, joking tone*]

I might—catch—cold!

KUBLAI

You jest, but your voice trembles. What! Are you afraid to die, immortal youth? Well, then, if you will confess that your soul is a stupid invention of your fear and that when you die you will be dead as a dead dog is dead—

MARCO

[*With sudden fury*]

You're a heathen liar!

[*He glares defiantly. His father and uncle moan with horror*]

KUBLAI

[*Laughs and claps his hands.* MARCO *is freed. The Kaan studies his sullen but relieved face with amusement*]

Your pardon, Marco! I suspected a flaw but you are perfect. You cannot imagine your death. You are a born hero. I must keep you near me. You shall tell me about your soul and I will listen as to a hundred wise men from the West! Is it agreed?

MARCO

[*Hesitatingly*]

I know it's a great honor, sir—but forgetting the soul side of it, I've got to eat.

KUBLAI

[*Astonished*]

To eat?

MARCO

I mean, I'm ambitious. I've got to succeed, and—

[*Suddenly blurts out*]

What can you pay me?

KUBLAI

Ha! Well, you will find me a practical man, too. I can start you upon any career you wish. What is your choice?

MAFFEO

[*Interposing eagerly*]

If I might speak to the boy in private a minute—give him my humble advice—he is so young—

[MAFFEO *and* NICOLO *hurriedly lead* MARCO *down to the foreground*]

MAFFEO

You've made a favorable impression—God knows why—but strike while the iron is hot, you ninny! Ask to be appointed a Second Class government commission-agent.

MARCO

[*Offendedly*]

No! I'll be first-class or nothing!

MAFFEO

Don't be a fool! A First Class agent is all brass buttons and no opportunities. A Second Class travels around, is allowed his expenses, gets friendly with all the dealers, scares them into letting him in on everything—and gets what's rightfully coming to him!

[*Then with a crafty look and a nudge in the ribs*]

And, being always in the secret, you'll be able to whisper to us in time to take advantage—

MARCO

[*A bit flustered—with bluff assertion*]

I don't know. The Kaan's been square with me. After all, honesty's the best policy, isn't it?

MAFFEO

[*Looking him over scathingly*]

You'd think I was advising you to steal—I, Maffeo Polo, whose conservatism is unquestioned!

MARCO

[*Awed*]

I didn't mean—

MAFFEO

[*Solemnly*]

Do you imagine the Kaan is such a Nero as to expect you to live on your salary?

MARCO

[*Uncertainly*]

No, I suppose not.

[*He suddenly looks at* MAFFEO *with a crafty wink*]

When I do give you a tip, what do I get from Polo Brothers?

MAFFEO

[*Between appreciation and dismay*]

Ha! You learn quickly, don't you?

[*Then hastily*]

Why, we—we've already thought of that—trust us to look after your best interests—and decided to—to make you a junior partner in the firm—eh, Nick?—Polo Brothers and Son—doesn't that sound solid, eh?

MARCO

[*With a sly grin*]

It's a great honor—a very great honor.

[*Then meaningly*]

But as neither of you are Neros, naturally you'll also offer me—

MAFFEO

[*Grinning in spite of himself*]

Hmm! Hmm! You Judas!

MARCO

A fair commission—

NICOLO

[*Blustering—but his eyes beaming with paternal pride*]

You young scamp!

MAFFEO

[*Laughing*]

Ha-ha! Good boy, Mark! Polos will be Polos!

[*They all embrace laughingly.* KUBLAI, *who has been observing them intently, turns to* CHU-YIN *and they both smile*]

KUBLAI

Did their Pope mean that a fool is a wiser study for a ruler of fools than a hundred wise men could be? This Marco touches me, as a child might, but at the same time there is something warped, deformed— Tell me, what shall I do with him?

CHU-YIN

Let him develop according to his own inclination and give him also every opportunity for true growth if he so desires. And let us observe him. At least, if he cannot learn, we shall.

KUBLAI

[*Smilingly*]

Yes. And be amused.

[*He calls commandingly*]

Marco Polo!

[MARCO *turns rather frightenedly and comes to the throne and kneels*]

Have you decided?

MARCO

[*Promptly*]

I'd like to be appointed a commission-agent of the Second Class.

KUBLAI

[*Somewhat taken aback, puzzledly*]

You are modest enough!

MARCO

[*Manfully*]

I want to start at the bottom!

KUBLAI

[*With mocking grandeur*]

Arise then, Second Class Marco! You will receive your agent's commission at once.

[*Then with a twinkle in his eye*]

But each time you return from a journey you must relate to me all the observations and comments of your soul on the East. Be warned and never fail me in this!

MARCO

[*Confused but cocksuredly*]

I won't. I'll take copious notes.

[*Then meaningly*]

And I can memorize any little humorous incidents—

MAFFEO

[*Apprehensively*]

Blessed Savior!

[*He gives a violent fit of coughing*]

MARCO

[*Looks around at him questioningly*]

Hum?

[*Misinterpreting his signal*]

And may I announce to your Majesty that a signal honor has just been conferred on me? My father and uncle have taken me into the firm. It will be Polo Brothers and Son from now on, and any way we can serve your Majesty—

KUBLAI

[*A light coming over his face*]

Aha! I begin to smell all the rats in Cathay!

[*The two elder* Polos *are bowed to the ground, trembling with apprehension.* Kublai *laughs quietly*]

Well, I am sure you wish to celebrate this family triumph together, so you may go. And accept my congratulations, Marco!

MARCO

Thank you, your Majesty. You will never regret it. I will always serve your best interests, so help me God!

[*He goes grandly, preceded hurriedly by the trembling* Nicolo *and* Maffeo. Kublai *laughs and turns to* Chu-Yin *who is smiling*]

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

ACT TWO

Scene One

Scene: *The Little Throne Room in the bamboo summer palace of the Kaan at Xanadu, the City of Peace—smaller, more intimate than the one at Cambaluc, but possessing an atmosphere of aloof dignity and simplicity fitting to the philosopher ruler who retreats here to contemplate in peace the vanity of his authority.*

About fifteen years have elapsed. It is a beautiful sunlit morning in late June. The Kaan reclines comfortably on his cushioned bamboo throne. His face has aged greatly. The expression has grown mask-like, full of philosophic calm. He has the detached air of an idol. Kukachin, *a beautiful young girl of twenty, pale and delicate, is sitting at his feet. Her air is grief-stricken. A flute player in the garden is playing a melancholy air.* Kukachin *recites in a low tone:*

KUKACHIN

My thoughts in this autumn are lonely and sad,
A chill wind from the mountain blows in the garden.
The sky is gray, a snowflake falls, the last chrysanthemum
Withers beside the deserted summer-house.
I walk along the path in which weeds have grown.
My heart is bitter and tears blur my eyes.
I grieve for the days when we lingered together

In this same garden, along these paths between flowers.
In the spring we sang of love and laughed with youth
But now we are parted by many leagues and years,
And I weep that never again shall I see your face.

[*She finishes and relapses into her attitude of broken resignation. The flute player ceases his playing.* KUBLAI *looks down at her tenderly*]

KUBLAI

[*Musingly*]

Sing while you can. When the voice fails, listen to song. When the heart fails, be sung asleep.

[*Chidingly*]

That is a sad poem, Little Flower. Are you sad because you must soon become Queen of Persia? But Arghun is a great hero, a Khan of the blood of Chinghiz. You will be blessed with strong sons able to dare the proud destiny of our blood.

KUKACHIN

[*Dully*]

Your will is my law.

KUBLAI

Not my will. The will of life to continue the strong.

[*Forcing a consoling tone*]

Come, Little Flower. You have been fading here. See how pale you have grown! Your eyes are listless! Your lips droop even in smiling! But life at the Court of Persia is gay. There will be feasts, celebrations, diverting pleasures. You will be their Queen of Beauty.

KUKACHIN

[*With a sigh*]

A Queen may be only a woman who is unhappy.

KUBLAI

[*Teasingly*]

What despair! You talk like the ladies in poems who have lost their lovers!

[KUKACHIN *gives a violent start which he does not notice and a spasm of pain comes over her face*]

But, never mind, Arghun of Persia is a hero no woman could fail to love.

KUKACHIN

[*Starting to her feet—desperately*]

No! I can bear his children, but you cannot force me to—

[*She breaks down, weeping*]

KUBLAI

[*Astonished—gazing at her searchingly*]

Have I ever forced you to anything?

[*Then resuming his tone of tender teasing*]

I would say, rather, that ever since you were old enough to talk, the Ruler of Earth, as they innocently call your grandfather, has been little better than your slave.

KUKACHIN

[*Taking his hand and kissing it*]

Forgive me.

[*Then smiling at him*]

Have I been so bad as that? Has my love for you, who have been both father and mother to me, brought you no happiness?

KUBLAI

[*With deep emotion*]

You have been a golden bird singing beside a black river. You took your mother's place in my heart when she died. I was younger then. The river was not so black—the river of

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man's life so deep and silent—flowing with an insane obsession —whither?—and why?

[*Then suddenly forcing a smile*]

Your poem has made me melancholy. And I am too old, if not too wise, to afford anything but optimism!

[*Then sadly*]

But now you in your turn must leave me, the river seems black indeed!

[*Then after a pause—tenderly*]

If it will make you unhappy, you need not marry Arghun Khan.

KUKACHIN

[*Recovering herself—resolutely*]

No. Your refusal would insult him. It might mean war.

[*Resignedly*]

And Arghun is as acceptable as any other. Forgive my weakness. You once told me a Princess must never weep.

[*She forces a smile*]

It makes no difference whether I stay or go, except that I shall be homesick for you.

[*She kisses his hand again*]

KUBLAI

[*Gratefully*]

My little one.

[*He strokes her hair. After a pause during which he looks at her thoughtfully—tenderly*]

We have never had secrets from each other, you and I. Tell me, can you have fallen in love?

KUKACHIN

[*After a pause—tremblingly*]

You must not ask that—if you respect my pride!

[*With a pitiful smile*]

You see—he does not even know—

[*She is blushing and hanging her head with confusion.* CHU-YIN *enters hurriedly from the right. He is very old but still upright. He is a bit breathless from haste but his face is wreathed in smiles*]

CHU-YIN

[*Making an obeisance*]

Your Majesty, do you hear that martial music? His Honor, Marco Polo, Mayor of Yang-Chau, seems about to visit you in state!

[*The strains of a distant band can be heard*]

KUBLAI

[*Still looking at* KUKACHIN *who has started violently at the mention of* MARCO'S *name—worriedly*]

Impossible! In love? . . .

[*Then to* CHU-YIN*—preoccupiedly*]

Eh? Marco? I have given no orders for him to return.

CHU-YIN

[*Ironically*]

No doubt he comes to refresh your humor with new copious notes on his exploits. Our Marco has made an active mayor. Yang-Chau, according to the petition for mercy you have received from its inhabitants, is the most governed of all your cities. I talked recently with a poet who had fled from there in horror. Yang-Chau used to have a soul, he said. Now it has a brand new Court House. And another, a man of wide culture, told me, our Christian mayor is exterminating our pleasures and our rats as if they were twin breeds of vermin!

KUBLAI

[*Irritably*]

He is beginning to weary me with his grotesque antics. A jester inspires mirth only so long as his deformity does not revolt one. Marco's spiritual hump begins to disgust me. He has not even a mortal soul, he has only an acquisitive instinct. We have given him every opportunity to learn. He has memorized everything and learned nothing. He has looked at everything and seen nothing. He has lusted for everything and loved nothing. He is only a shrewd and crafty greed. I shall send him home to his native wallow.

CHU-YIN

[*In mock alarm*]

What? Must we lose our clown?

KUKACHIN

[*Who has been listening with growing indignation*]

How dare you call him a clown? Just because he is not a dull philosopher you think—

KUBLAI

[*Astounaed—admonishingly*]

Princess!

KUKACHIN

[*Turns to him—on the verge of tears—rebelliously*]

Why are you both so unjust? Has he not done well everything he was ever appointed to do? Has he not always succeeded where others failed? Has he not by his will-power and determination risen to the highest rank in your service?

[*Then her anger dying—more falteringly*]

He is strange, perhaps, to people who do not understand him,

but that is because he is so different from other men, so much stronger! And he has a soul! I know he has!

KUBLAI

[*Whose eyes have been searching her face—aghast*]
Kukachin!

[*She sees he has guessed her secret and at first she quails and shrinks away, then stiffens regally and returns his gaze unflinchingly.* CHU-YIN *looks from one to the other comprehendingly. Finally* KUBLAI *addresses her sternly*]

So, because I have allowed this fool a jester's latitude, because I permitted him to amuse you when you were a little girl, and since then, on his returns, to speak with you—a Princess!—

[*Then brusquely*]
I shall inform the ambassadors you will be ready to sail for Persia within ten days. You may retire.

[*She bows with a proud humility and walks off Left.* KUBLAI *sits in a somber study, frowning and biting his lips. The blaring of* MARCO'S *band grows steadily nearer*]

CHU-YIN

[*Gently*]
Is intolerance wisdom?

[*A pause. Then he goes on*]
I have suspected her love for him for a long time.

KUBLAI

Why didn't you warn me?

CHU-YIN

Love is to wisdom what wisdom seems to love—a folly. I reasoned, love comes like the breath of wind on water and is

gone leaving calm and reflection. I reasoned, but this is an enchanted moment for her and it will remain a poignant memory to recompense her when she is no longer a girl but merely a Queen. And I reasoned, who knows but some day this Marco may see into her eyes and his soul may be born and that will make a very interesting study—for Kukachin, and her grandfather, the Son of Heaven and Ruler of the World!

[*He bows mockingly*]

And for the old fool who is I!

KUBLAI

[*Bewilderedly*]

I cannot believe it! Why, since she was a little girl, she has only talked to him once or twice every two years or so!

CHU-YIN

That was unwise, for thus he has remained a strange, mysterious dream-knight from the exotic West, an enigma with something about him of a likable boy who brought her home each time a humble, foolish, touching little gift! And also remember that on each occasion he returned in triumph, having accomplished a task—a victor, more or less, acting the hero.

[*The band has crashed and dinned its way into the courtyard*]

As now! Listen!

[*He goes to the window and looks down—with ironical but intense amusement*]

Ah! He wears over his Mayor's uniform, the regalia of Cock of Paradise in his secret fraternal order of the Mystic Knights of Confucius! The band of the Xanadu lodge is with him as well as his own! He is riding on a very fat white horse. He dismounts, aided by the steps of your Imperial Palace! He

slaps a policeman on the back and asks his name! He chucks a baby under the chin and asks the mother its name. She lies and says "Marco" although the baby is a girl. He smiles. He is talking loudly so everyone can overhear. He gives the baby one yen to start a savings account and encourage its thrift. The mother looks savagely disappointed. The crowd cheers. He keeps his smile frozen as he notices an artist sketching him. He shakes hands with a one-legged veteran of the Manzi campaign and asks his name. The veteran is touched. Tears come to his eyes. He tells him—but the Polo forgets his name even as he turns to address the crowd. He waves one hand for silence. The band stops. It is the hand on which he wears five large jade rings. The other hand rests upon—and pats—the head of a bronze dragon, our ancient symbol of Yang, the celestial, male principle of the Cosmos. He clears his throat, the crowd stands petrified, he is about to draw a deep breath and open his mouth carefully in position one of the five phonetic exercises—

[*Here* CHU-YIN *chuckles*]

But I am an old man full of malice and venom and it embitters me to see others unreasonably happy so—

[*Here just as* MARCO *is heard starting to speak, he throws open the window and calls in a loud, commanding tone*]

Messer Polo, His Imperial Majesty commands that you stop talking, dismiss your followers, and repair to his presence at once!

MARCO'S VOICE

[*Very faint and crestfallen*]

Oh—all right—I'll be right there.

KUBLAI

[*Cannot control a laugh in spite of himself—helplessly*]
How can one deal seriously with such a child-actor?

CHU-YIN

[*Coming back from the window—ironically*]
Most women, including Kukachin, love children—and all women must take acting seriously in order to love at all.

[*Just as he finishes speaking,* KUKACHIN *enters from the left. She is terribly alarmed. She throws herself at* KUBLAI'S *feet*]

KUKACHIN

Why did you summon him? I told you he does not know. It is all my fault! Punish me, if you will! But promise me you will not harm him!

KUBLAI

[*Looking down at her—sadly*]
Is it my custom to take vengeance?

[*Then as people are heard approaching—quickly*]
Compose yourself! Remember again, Princesses may not weep!

[*She springs to her feet, turns away for a moment, then turns back, her face rigidly calm and emotionless.* KUBLAI *nods with appreciation of her control*]
Good. You will make a Queen.

[*She bows and retires backward to the left side of the throne. At the same moment,* NICOLO *and* MAFFEO POLO *enter ceremoniously from the right. They wear the regalia of officers in the Mystic Knights of Confucius over their rich merchants' robes. (This costume is a queer jumble of stunning effects that recall the parade uniforms of our modern Knights Templar, of Columbus,*

of Pythias, Mystic Shriners, the Klan, etc.) They are absurdly conscious and proud of this get-up—like two old men in a children's play. KUBLAI *and* CHU-YIN *regard them with amused astonishment. Even* KUKACHIN *cannot restrain a smile. They prostrate themselves at the foot of the throne. Then just at the right moment, preceded by a conscious cough,* MARCO POLO *makes his entrance. Over his gorgeous uniform of Mayor, he wears his childishly fantastic regalia as chief of the Mystic Knights of Confucius. As he steps on, he takes off his gilded, laced hat with its Bird of Paradise plumes and bows with a mechanical dignity on all sides. He has the manner and appearance of a successful movie star at a masquerade ball, disguised so that no one can fail to recognize him. His regular, good-looking, well-groomed face is carefully arranged into the grave responsible expression of a Senator from the South of the United States of America about to propose an amendment to the Constitution restricting the migration of non-Nordic birds into Texas, or prohibiting the practice of the laws of biology within the twelve-mile limit. He moves in stately fashion to the throne and prostrates himself before the* KAAN. KUKACHIN *stares at him with boundless admiration, hoping to catch his eye. The* KAAN *looks from her to him and his face grows stern.* CHU-YIN *is enjoying himself*]

KUBLAI

Rise.

[MARCO *does so.* KUBLAI *continues dryly*]

To what do I owe the honor of this unexpected visit?

MARCO

[*Hastily, but with full confidence*]

Well, I was sending in to your treasury the taxes of Yang-Chau for the fiscal year, and I knew you'd be so astonished at the unprecedented amount I had sweated out of them that you'd want to know how I did it—so here I am.

[*An awkward pause.* MARCO *is disconcerted at the* KAAN'S *steady impersonal stare. He glances about—sees the* PRINCESS—*welcomes this opportunity for diverting attention. Bowing with humble respect*]

Pardon me, Princess. I didn't recognize you before, you've gotten so grown up.

[*Flatteringly*]

You look like a Queen.

KUKACHIN

[*Falteringly*]

I bid you welcome, Your Honor.

KUBLAI

[*As a warning to* KUKACHIN *to control her emotion*]

The Princess will soon be Queen of Persia.

MARCO

[*Flustered and awed, bowing to her again—flatteringly*]

Then—Your Majesty—if I may be humbly permitted

[*Bowing to* KUBLAI]

—to offer my congratulations—and before I settle down to discussing business—if her Highness—Majesty—will accept a small token of my esteem—

[*Here he stamps his foot. An* AFRICAN SLAVE, *dressed in a pink livery with green hat and shoes and stockings and carrying a golden wicker basket, enters. He kneels,*

presents the basket to MARCO, *who lifts the cover and pulls out a small chow puppy with a pink ribbon tied around its neck. He steps forward and offers this to the* PRINCESS, *with a boyish grin*]

A contribution to your zoo—from your most humble servant!

KUKACHIN

[*Taking it—flushing with pleasure*]

Oh, what a little darling!

[*She cuddles the puppy in her arms*]

MARCO

[*Boastfully*]

He's a genuine, pedigreed pup. I procured him at great cost—I mean he's extra well-bred.

KUKACHIN

Oh, thank you so much, Marco Polo!

[*Stammering*]

I mean, Your Honor.

KUBLAI

[*Warningly*]

His Honor wishes to talk business, Princess.

KUKACHIN

[*Controlling herself*]

I ask pardon.

[*She bows and retires to left, rear, where she stands fondling the puppy and watching* MARCO]

MARCO

[*Plunging in confidently on what he thinks is a sure point of attack*]

My tax scheme, Your Majesty, that got such wonderful results is simplicity itself. I simply reversed the old system. For

one thing I found they had a high tax on excess profits. Imagine a profit being excess! Why, it isn't humanly possible! I repealed it. And I repealed the tax on luxuries. I found out the great majority in Yang-Chau couldn't afford luxuries. The tax wasn't democratic enough to make it pay! I crossed it off and I wrote on the statute books a law that taxes every necessity in life, a law that hits every man's pocket equally, be he beggar or banker! And I got results!

CHU-YIN

[*Gravely*]

In beggars?

KUBLAI

[*With a chilling air*]

I have received a petition from the inhabitants of Yang-Chau enumerating over three thousand cases of your gross abuse of power!

MARCO

[*Abashed only for a moment*]

Oh, so they've sent that vile slander to you, have they? That's the work of a mere handful of radicals—

KUBLAI

[*Dryly*]

Five hundred thousand names are signed to it.

[*Still more dryly*]

Half a million citizens accuse you of endeavoring to stamp out their ancient culture!

MARCO

What! Why, I even had a law passed that anyone caught interfering with culture would be subject to a fine! It was Section One of a blanket statute that every citizen must be happy

or go to jail. I found it was the unhappy ones who were always making trouble and getting discontented. You see, here's the way I figure it; if a man's good, he's happy—and if he isn't happy, it's a sure sign he's no good to himself or anyone else and he better be put where he can't do harm.

KUBLAI

[*A bit helplessly now*]

They complain that you have entirely prohibited all free expression of opinion.

MARCO

[*Feelingly*]

Well, when they go to the extreme of circulating such treasonable opinions against me, isn't it time to protect your sovereignty by strong measures?

[KUBLAI *stares at this effrontery with amazement.* MARCO *watches this impression and hurries on with an injured dignity*]

I can't believe, Your Majesty, that this minority of malcontents can have alienated your long-standing high regard for me!

KUBLAI

[*Conquered—suddenly overpowered by a great smile*]

Not so! You are the marvel of mankind! And I would be lost without you!

MARCO

[*Flattered but at the same time nonplussed*]

I thank you!

[*Hesitatingly*]

But, to tell the truth, I want to resign, anyhow. I've done all I could. I've appointed five hundred committees to carry on

my work and I retire confident that with the system I've instituted everything will go on automatically and brains are no longer needed.

[*He adds as a bitter afterthought*]

And it's lucky they're not or Yang-Chau would soon be a ruin!

KUBLAI

[*With mock seriousness*]

In behalf of the population of Yang-Chau I accept your resignation, with deep regret for the loss of your unique and extraordinary services.

[*Then suddenly in a strange voice*]

Do you still possess your immortal soul, Marco Polo?

MARCO

[*Flustered*]

Ha-ha! Yes, of course—at least I hope so. But I see the joke. You mean that Yang-Chau used to be a good place to lose one. Well, you wouldn't know the old town now. Sin is practically unseen.

[*Hurrying on to another subject—boisterously*]

But however much I may have accomplished there, it's nothing to the big surprise I've got in reserve for you. May I demonstrate?

[*Without waiting for permission, takes a piece of printed paper like a dollar bill from his pocket*]

What is it? Paper. Correct! What is it worth? Nothing. That's where you're mistaken. It's worth ten yen. No, I'm not a liar! See ten yen written on it, don't you? Well, I'll tell you the secret. This is money, legally valued at ten yens' worth of anything you wish to buy, by order of His Imperial Majesty, the Great Kaan! Do you see my point? Its advan-

tages over gold and silver coin are obvious. It's light, easy to carry,—

[*Here he gives a prodigious wink*]

wears out quickly, can be made at very slight expense and yields enormous profit. Think of getting ten yen for this piece of paper. Yet it can be done. If you make the people believe it's worth it, it is! After all, when you stop to think, who was it first told them gold was money? I'll bet anything it was some quick-thinker who'd just discovered a gold mine!

[KUBLAI *and* CHU-YIN *stare at him in petrified incredulity. He mistakes it for admiration and is flattered. Bows and lays his paper money on the* KAAN'S *knee*]

You're stunned, I can see that. It's so simple—and yet, who ever thought of it before me? I was amazed myself. Think it over, Your Majesty, and let the endless possibilities dawn on you! And now I want to show another little aid to government that I thought out.

[*He makes a sign to his uncle and father. The former takes a mechanical contrivance out of a box and sets it up on the floor. It is a working model of a clumsy cannon.* NICOLO, *meanwhile, takes children's blocks out of his box and builds them into a fortress wall.* MARCO *is talking. His manner and voice have become grave and portentous*]

It all came to me, like an inspiration, last Easter Sunday when Father and Uncle and I were holding a little service. Uncle read a prayer which spoke of Our Lord as the Prince of Peace. Somehow, that took hold of me. I thought to myself, well, it's funny, there always have been wars and there always will be, I suppose, because I've never read much in any history

about heroes who waged peace. Still, that's wrong. War is a waste of money which eats into the profits of life like thunder! Then why war, I asked myself? But how are you going to end it? Then the flash came! There's only one workable way and that's to conquer everybody else in the world so they'll never dare fight you again! An impossible task, you object? Not any more! This invention you see before you makes conquering easy. Let me demonstrate with these models. On our right, you see the fortress wall of a hostile capital. Under your present system with battering rams, to make an effective breach in this wall would cost you the lives of ten thousand men. Valuing each life conservatively at ten yen, this amounts to one hundred thousand yen! This makes the cost of breaching prohibitive. But all of this waste can be saved. How? Just keep your eyes on your right and permit my exclusive invention to solve this problem.

[*He addresses the fortress in a matter-of-fact tone*]

So you won't surrender, eh?

[*Then in a mock-heroic falsetto, answering himself like a ventriloquist*]

We die but we never surrender!

[*Then matter-of-factly*]

Well, Brother, those heroic sentiments do you a lot of credit, but this is war and not a tragedy. You're up against new methods this time, and you better give in and avoid wasteful bloodshed.

[*Answering himself*]

No! Victory or Death!

[*Then again*]

All right, Brother, don't blame me. Fire!

[*His uncle fires the gun. There is a bang, and a leaden ball is shot out which knocks a big breach in the wall of blocks.* MARCO *beams.* KUKACHIN *gives a scream of fright, then a gasp of delight, and claps her hands.* MARCO *bows to her the more gratefully as* KUBLAI *and* CHU-YIN *are staring at him with a queer appalled wonder that puzzles him although he cannot imagine it is not admiration*]

I see you are stunned again. What made it do that, you're wondering? This!

[*He takes a little package out of his pocket and pours some black powder out of it on his palm*]

It's the same powder they've been using here in children's fire works. They've had it under their noses for years without a single soul ever having creative imagination enough to visualize the enormous possibilities. But you can bet I did! It was a lad crying with a finger half blown off where he held a fire-cracker too long that first opened my eyes. I learned the formula, improved on it, experimented in secret, and here's the gratifying result!

[*He takes the cannon ball from his father who has retrieved it*]

You see? Now just picture this little ball magnified into one weighing twenty pounds or so and then you'll really grasp my idea. The destruction of property and loss of life would be tremendous! No one could resist you!

KUBLAI

[*After a pause—musingly*]

I am interested in the hero of that city who preferred death to defeat. Did you conquer his immortal soul?

MARCO

[*With frankness*]

Well, you can't consider souls when you're dealing with soldiers, can you?

[*He takes his model and places it on the* KAAN'S *knee with the paper money*]

When you have time, I wish you'd look this over. In fact—and this is the big idea I've been saving for the last—consider these two inventions of mine in combination. You conquer the world with this—

[*He pats the cannon-model*]

and you pay for it with this.

[*He pats the paper money—rhetorically*]

You become the bringer of peace on earth and good-will to men, and it doesn't cost you a yen hardly. Your initial expense —my price—is as low as I can possibly make it out of my deep affection for your Majesty—only a million yen.

KUBLAI

[*Quickly*]

In paper?

MARCO

[*With a grin and a wink*]

No. I'd prefer gold, if you don't mind.

[*Silence.* MARCO *goes on meaningly*]

Of course, I don't want to force them on you. I'm confident there's a ready market for them elsewhere.

KUBLAI

[*Grimly smiling*]

Oh, I quite realize that in self-protection I've got to buy them—or kill you!

MARCO

[*Briskly*]

Then it's a bargain? But I've still got one proviso—that you give us permission to go home.

[KUKACHIN *gives a little gasp.* MARCO *goes on feelingly*] We're homesick, Your Majesty. We've served you faithfully, and frankly now that we've made our fortune we want to go home and enjoy it. There's no place like home, Your Majesty! I'm sure even a King in his palace appreciates that.

KUBLAI

[*With smiling mockery*]

But—who can play your part? And your mission—your example? What will your Pope say when you tell him I'm still unconverted?

MARCO

[*Confidently*]

Oh, you will be—on your death-bed, if not before—a man of your common sense.

KUBLAI

[*Ironically*]

Courtier!

[*Then solemnly*]

But my last objection is insurmountable. You haven't yet proved you have an immortal soul!

MARCO

It doesn't need proving.

KUBLAI

If you could only bring forward one reliable witness.

MARCO

My Father and Uncle can swear—

KUBLAI

They think it is a family trait. Their evidence is prejudiced.

MARCO

[*Worried now—looks at* CHU-YIN *hopefully*]

Mr. Chu-Yin ought to be wise enough to acknowledge—

CHU-YIN

[*Smiling*]

But I believe that what can be proven cannot be true.

[MARCO *stands puzzled, irritated, looking stubborn, frightened and foolish. His eyes wander about the room, finally resting appealingly on* KUKACHIN]

KUKACHIN

[*Suddenly steps forward—flushed but proudly*]

I will bear witness he has a soul.

[KUBLAI *looks at her with a sad wonderment,* CHU-YIN *smilingly,* MARCO *with gratitude,* NICOLO *and* MAFFEO *exchange a glance of congratulation*]

KUBLAI

How can you know, Princess?

KUKACHIN

Because I have seen it—once, when he bound up my dog's leg, once when he played with a slave's baby, once when he listened to music over water and I heard him sigh, once when he looked at sunrise, another time at sunset, another at the stars, another at the moon, and each time he said that Nature was wonderful. And all the while, whenever he has been with me I have always felt—something strange and different—and that something must be His Honor's soul, must it not?

KUBLAI

[*With wondering bitterness*]

The eye sees only its own sight.

CHU-YIN

But a woman may feel life in the unborn.

KUBLAI

[*Mockingly but sadly*]

I cannot contest the profound intuitions of virgins and mystics. Go home, Your Honor, Immortal Marco, and live forever!

[*With forced gaiety*]

And tell your Pope your example has done much to convert me to wisdom—if I could find the true one!

KUKACHIN

[*Boldly now*]

And may I humbly request, since His Honor, and his father and uncle, are experienced masters of navigation, that they be appointed, for my greater safety, to attend me and command the fleet on my voyage to Persia?

KUBLAI

[*Astonished at her boldness—rebukingly*]

Princess!

KUKACHIN

[*Returning his look—simply*]

It is the last favor I shall ever ask. I wish to be converted to wisdom, too—one or another—before I become a name.

KUBLAI

[*Bitterly*]

I cannot deny your last request, even though you wish your own unhappiness.

[*To the* POLOS]

You will accompany the Princess.

MARCO

[*Jubilantly*]

I'll be only too glad!

[*Turning to the* PRINCESS]

It'll be a great pleasure!

[*Then briskly*]

And have we your permission to trade in the ports along the way?

KUKACHIN

[*To* MARCO, *embarrassedly*]

As you please, Your Honor.

MARCO

[*Bowing low*]

I'll promise it won't disturb you. It's really a scheme to while away the hours, for I warn you in advance this is liable to be a mighty long trip.

KUKACHIN

[*Impulsively*]

I do not care how long—

[*She stops in confusion*]

MARCO

Now if I had the kind of ships we build in Venice to work with I could promise you a record passage, but with your tubby junks it's just as well to expect the worst and you'll never be disappointed.

[*Familiarly*]

And the trouble with any ship, for a man of action, is that there's so little you can do. I hate idleness where there's nothing to occupy your mind but thinking. I've been so used to being out, overcoming obstacles, getting things done, creating

results where there weren't any before, going after the impossible—well—

[*Here he gives a little deprecating laugh*]

all play and no work makes Jack a dull boy. I'm sure I'd make a pretty dull person to have around if there wasn't plenty to do. You might not believe it, but when I'm idle I actually get gloomy sometimes!

KUKACHIN

[*Eagerly*]

But we shall have dancers on the ship and actors who will entertain us with plays—

MARCO

[*Heartily*]

That'll be grand. There's nothing better than to sit down in a good seat at a good play after a good day's work in which you know you've accomplished something, and after you've had a good dinner, and just take it easy and enjoy a good wholesome thrill or a good laugh and get your mind off serious things until it's time to go to bed.

KUKACHIN

[*Vaguely*]

Yes.

[*Then eager to have him pleased*]

And there will be poets to recite their poems—

MARCO

[*Not exactly overjoyed*]

That'll be nice.

[*Then very confidentially—in a humorous whisper*]

I'll tell you a good joke on me, Your Highness. I once wrote a poem myself; would you ever believe it to look at me?

KUKACHIN

[*Smiling at him as at a boy—teasingly*]

No?

MARCO

[*Smiling back like a boy*]

Yes, I did too, when I was young and foolish. It wasn't bad stuff either, considering I'd had no practice.

[*Frowning with concentration*]

Wait! Let me see if I can remember any—oh, yes—"You are lovely as the gold in the sun."

[*He hesitates*]

KUKACHIN

[*Thrilled*]

That is beautiful!

MARCO

That's only the first line.

[*Then jokingly*]

You can consider yourself lucky. I don't remember the rest.

KUKACHIN

[*Dropping her eyes—softly*]

Perhaps on the voyage you may be inspired to write another.

KUBLAI

[*Who has been staring at them with weary amazement*]

Life is so stupid, it is mysterious!

DARKNESS

ACT TWO

Scene Two

Scene: *The wharves of the Imperial Fleet at the seaport of Zayton—several weeks later. At the left, stern to, is an enormous junk, the flagship. The wharf extends out, rear, to the right of her. At the right is a warehouse, from a door in which a line of half-naked slaves, their necks, waists, and right ankles linked up by chains, form an endless chain which revolves mechanically, as it were, on sprocket wheels in the interiors of the shed and the junk. As each individual link passes out of the shed it carries a bale on its head, moves with mechanical precision across the wharf, disappears into the junk, and reappears a moment later having dumped its load and moves back into the shed. The whole process is a man-power original of the modern devices with bucket scoops that dredge, load coal, sand, etc. By the side of the shed, a foreman sits with a drum and gong with which he marks a perfect time for the slaves, a four beat rhythm, three beats of the drum, the fourth a bang on the gong as one slave at each end loads and unloads. The effect is like the noise of a machine.*

A bamboo stair leads up to the high poop of the junk from front, left. It is just getting dawn. A forest of masts, spars, sails of woven bamboo laths, shuts out all view of the harbor at the end of the wharf. At the foot of the stairs, Chu-Yin *stands like a sentinel. Above on top of the poop, the figures of* Kublai *and* Kukachin *are outlined against the lightening sky.*

KUBLAI

[*Brokenly*]

I must go.

[*He takes her in his arms*]

We have said all we can say. Little Daughter, all rare things are secrets which cannot be revealed to anyone. That is why life must be so lonely. But I love you more dearly than anything on earth. And I know you love me. So perhaps we do not need to understand.

[*Rebelliously*]

Yet I wish some Power could give me assurance that in granting your desire I am acting for your happiness, and for your eventual deliverance from sorrow to acceptance and peace.

[*He notices she is weeping—in self-reproach*]

Old fool! I have made you weep again! I am death advising life how to live! Be deaf to me! Strive after what your heart desires! Who can ever know which are the mistakes we make? One should be either sad or joyful. Contentment is a warm sty for the eaters and sleepers!

[*Impulsively*]

Do not weep! Even now I can refuse your hand to Arghun. Let it mean war!

KUKACHIN

[*Looking up and controlling herself—with a sad finality*]

You do not understand. I wish to take this voyage.

KUBLAI

[*Desperately*]

But I could keep Polo here.

[*With impotent anger*]

He shall pray for his soul on his knees before you!

KUKACHIN

[*With calm sadness*]

Do I want a slave?

[*Dreamily*]

I desire a captain of my ship on a long voyage in dangerous, enchanted seas.

KUBLAI

[*With a fierce defiance of fate*]

I am the Great Kaan! I shall have him killed!

[*A pause*]

CHU-YIN

[*From below, recites in a calm, soothing tone*]

The noble man ignores self. The wise man ignores action. His truth acts without deeds. His knowledge venerates the unknowable. To him birth is not the beginning nor is death the end.

[KUBLAI'S *head bends in submission.* CHU-YIN *continues tenderly*]

I feel there are tears in your eyes. The Great Kaan, Ruler of the World, may not weep.

KUBLAI

[*Brokenly*]

Ruler? I am my slave!

[*Then controlling himself—forcing an amused teasing tone*]

Marco will soon be here, wearing the self-assurance of an immortal soul and his new admiral's uniform! I must fly in retreat from what I can neither laugh away nor kill. Write when you reach Persia. Tell me—all you can tell—particularly what his immortal soul is like!

[*Then tenderly*]

Farewell, Little Flower! Live. There is no other advice possible from one human being to another.

KUKACHIN

Live—and love!

KUBLAI

[*Trying to renew his joking tone*]

One's ancestors, particularly one's grandfather. Do not forget me!

KUKACHIN

Never!

[*They embrace*]

KUBLAI

[*Chokingly*]

Farewell.

[*He hurries down the ladder—to* CHU-YIN]

You remain—see him—bring me word—

[*He turns his head up to* KUKACHIN]

For the last time, farewell, Little Flower of my life! May you know happiness!

[*He turns quickly and goes*]

KUKACHIN

Farewell!

[*She bows her head on the rail and weeps*]

CHU-YIN

[*After a pause*]

You are tired, Princess. Your eyes are red from weeping and your nose is red. You look old—a little homely, even. The Admiral Polo will not recognize you.

[KUKACHIN *dries her eyes hastily*]

KUKACHIN

[*Half-smiling and half-weeping at his teasing*]

I think you are a very horrid old man!

CHU-YIN

A little sleep, Princess, and you will be beautiful. The old dream passes. Sleep and awake in the new. Life is perhaps most wisely regarded as a bad dream between two awakenings, and every day is a life in miniature.

KUKACHIN

[*Wearily and drowsily*]

Your wisdom makes me sleep.

[*Her head sinks back on her arms and she is soon asleep*]

CHU-YIN

[*After a pause—softly*]

Kukachin!

[*He sees she is asleep—chuckles*]

I have won a convert.

[*Then speculatively*]

Youth needs so much sleep and old age so little. Is that not a proof that from birth to death one grows steadily closer to complete life? Hum.

[*He ponders on this. From the distance comes the sound of* POLO'S *band playing the same martial air as in the previous scene.* CHU-YIN *starts—then smiles. The music quickly grows louder. The* PRINCESS *awakes with a start*]

KUKACHIN

[*Startledly*]

Chu-Yin! Is that the Admiral coming?

CHU-YIN

[*Dryly*]

I suspect so. It is like him not to neglect a person in the city when saying good-bye.

KUKACHIN

[*Flurriedly*]

I must go to my cabin for a moment.

[*She hurries back*]

CHU-YIN

[*Listens with a pleased, ironical smile as the band gets rapidly nearer. Finally it seems to turn a corner nearby, and a moment later, to a deafening clangor,* MARCO *enters, dressed in a gorgeous Admiral's uniform. Two paces behind, side by side, walk* MAFFEO *and* NICOLO, *dressed only a trifle less gorgeously as Commodores. Behind them comes the band.* MARCO *halts as he sees* CHU-YIN, *salutes condescendingly, and signals the band to be silent.* CHU-YIN *bows gravely and remarks as if answering an argument in his own mind*]

Still, even though they cannot be house-broken, I prefer monkeys because they are so much less noisy.

MARCO

[*With a condescending grin*]

What's that—more philosophy?

[*Clapping him on the back*]

Well, I like your determination.

[*He wipes his brow with a handkerchief*]

Phew! I'll certainly be glad to get back home where I can hear some music that I can keep step to. My feet just won't give in to your tunes.

[*With a grin*]

And look at the Old Man and Uncle. They're knock-kneed for life.

[*Confidentially*]

Still, I thought the band was a good idea—to sort of cheer up the Princess, and let people know she's leaving at the same time.

[*As people begin to come in and stare at the poop of the ship*]

See the crowd gather? I got them out of bed, too!

CHU-YIN

[*Ironically*]

You also woke up the Princess. You sail at sunrise?

MARCO

[*Briskly—taking operations in hand*]

Thank you for reminding me. I've got to hurry.

[*To his* FATHER *and* UNCLE]

You two better get aboard your ships and be ready to cast off when I signal.

[*They go off. He suddenly bawls to someone in the ship*]

Much more cargo to load?

A VOICE

Less than a hundred bales, sir.

MARCO

Good. Call all hands on deck and stand by to put sail on her.

A VOICE

Aye-aye, sir.

MARCO

And look lively, damn your lazy souls!

[*To* CHU-YIN—*complacently*]

You've got to impose rigid discipline on shipboard.

CHU-YIN

[*Inquisitively*]

I suppose you feel your heavy responsibility as escort to the future Queen of Persia?

MARCO

[*Soberly*]

Yes, I do. I'll confess I do. If she were a million yen's worth of silk or spices, I wouldn't worry an instant, but a Queen, that's a different matter. However, when you give my last word to His Majesty, you can tell him that I've always done my duty by him and I won't fail him this time. As long as I've a breath in me, I'll take care of her!

CHU-YIN

[*With genuine appreciation*]

That is bravely spoken.

MARCO

I don't know anything about brave speaking. I'm by nature a silent man, and I let my actions do the talking. But, as I've proved to you people in Cathay time and again, when I say I'll do a thing, I do it!

CHU-YIN

[*Suddenly with a sly smile to himself*]

I was forgetting. His Majesty gave me some secret last instructions for you. You are, at some time every day of the voyage, to look carefully and deeply into the Princess's eyes and note what you see there.

MARCO

What for?

[*Then brightly*]

Oh, he's afraid she'll get fever in the tropics. Well, you tell him I'll see to it she keeps in good condition. I'll do what's right by her without considering fear or favor.

[*Then practically*]

Then, of course, if her husband thinks at the end of the voyage that my work deserves a bonus—why, that's up to him.

[*Inquisitively*]

She's never seen him, has she?

CHU-YIN

No.

MARCO

[*With an air of an independent thinker*]

Well, I believe in love matches myself, even for Kings and Queens.

[*With a grin*]

Come to think of it, I'll be getting married to Donata myself when I get home.

CHU-YIN

Donata?

MARCO

[*Proudly*]

The best little girl in the world! She's there waiting for me.

CHU-YIN

You have heard from her?

MARCO

I don't need to hear. I can trust her. And I've been true to her, too. I haven't ever thought of loving anyone else. Of

course, I don't mean I've been any he-virgin. I've played with concubines at odd moments when my mind needed relaxation—but that's only human nature.

[*His eyes glistening reminiscently*]

Some of them were beauties, too!

[*With a sigh*]

Well, I've had my fun and I suppose it's about time I settled down.

CHU-YIN

Poor Princess!

MARCO

What's that? Oh, I see, yes, I sympathize with her, too—going into a harem. If there's one thing more than another that proves you in the East aren't responsible, it's that harem notion.

[*With a grin*]

Now in the West we've learned by experience that one at a time is trouble enough.

CHU-YIN

[*Dryly*]

Be sure and converse on love and marriage often with the Princess. I am certain you will cure her.

MARCO

[*Mystified*]

Cure her?

CHU-YIN

Cure her mind of any unreasonable imaginings.

MARCO

[*Easily*]

Oh, I'll guarantee she'll be contented, if that's what you mean.

[*The human chain in back finishes its labors and disappears into the shed. The crowd of people has been steadily augmented by new arrivals, until a small multitude is gathered standing in silence staring up at the poop.* MARCO *says with satisfaction*]

Well, cargo's all aboard, before schedule, too. We killed six slaves but, by God, we did it! And look at the crowd we've drawn, thanks to my band!

CHU-YIN

[*Disgustedly*]

They would have come without noise. They love their Princess.

MARCO

[*Cynically*]

Maybe, but they love their sleep, too. I know 'em!

[*A cry of adoration goes up from the crowd. With one movement they prostrate themselves as the* PRINCESS *comes from the cabin dressed in a robe of silver and stands at the rail looking down*]

THE CROWD

[*In a long, ululating whisper*]

Farewell—farewell—farewell—farewell!

KUKACHIN

[*Silences them with a motion of her hand*]

I shall know the long sorrow of an exile
As I sail over the green water and the blue water
Alone under a strange sky amid alien flowers and faces.
My eyes shall be ever red with weeping, my heart bleeding,
While I long for the land of my birth and my childhood
Remembering with love the love of my people.

[*A sound of low weeping comes from the crowd*]

Farewell!

THE CROWD

Farewell—farewell—farewell—farewell!

MARCO

[*Feeling foolish because he is moved*]

Damn it! Reciting always makes me want to cry about something. Poetry acts worse on me than wine that way.

[*He calls up—very respectfully*]

Princess! We'll be sailing at once. Would you mind retiring to your cabin? I'm afraid you're going to catch cold standing bareheaded in the night air.

KUKACHIN

[*Tremulously—grateful for his solicitude*]

I am in your charge, Admiral. I am grateful that you should think of my health, and I obey.

[*She turns and goes back into her cabin. The crowd silently filters away, leaving only the band*]

MARCO

[*Proudly and fussily*]

You can't have women around when you're trying to get something done. I can see where I'll have to be telling her what to do every second. Well, I hope she'll take it in good part and not forget I'm acting in her husband's interests, not my own.

[*Very confidentially*]

You know, apart from her being a Princess, I've always respected her a lot. She's not haughty and she's—well, human, that's what I mean. I'd do anything I could for her, Princess or not! Yes, sir!

CHU-YIN

[*Wonderingly*]

There may be hope—after all.

MARCO

What's that?

CHU-YIN

Nothing. Enigma!

MARCO

There's always hope! Don't be a damned pessimist!

[*Clapping him on the back*]

Enigma, eh? Well, if that isn't like a philosopher—to start in on riddles just at the last moment!

[*He ascends half-way up the ladder to the poop, then turns back to* CHU-YIN *with a chuckle*]

Take a fool's advice and don't think so much or you'll get old before your time!

[*More oratorically*]

If you look before you leap, you'll decide to sit down. Keep on going ahead and you can't help being right! You're bound to get somewhere!

[*He suddenly breaks into a grin again*]

There! Don't ever say I never gave you good advice!

[*He springs swiftly to the top deck and bellows*]

Cast off there amidships! Where the hell are you—asleep? Set that foresail! Hop, you kidney-footed gang of thumb-fingered infidels!

[*He turns with a sudden fierceness on the band who are standing stolidly, awaiting orders*]

Hey you! Didn't I tell you to strike up when I set foot on the

deck? What do you think I paid you in advance for—to wave me good-bye?

[*The band plunges madly into it. A frenzied cataract of sound results.* CHU-YIN *covers his ears and moves away, shaking his head, as* MARCO *leans over the rail and bawls after him*]

And tell the Kaan—anything he wants—write me—just Venice—they all know me there—and if they don't, by God, they're going to!

DARKNESS

ACT TWO

Scene Three

Scene: *Poop deck of the royal junk of the* Princess Kukachin *at anchor in the harbor of Hormuz, Persia—a moonlight night some two years later. On a silver throne at center* Kukachin *is sitting dressed in a gorgeous golden robe of ceremony. Her beauty has grown more intense, her face has undergone a change, it is the face of a woman who has known real sorrow and suffering. In the shadow of the highest deck in rear her women-in-waiting are in a group, sitting on cushions. On the highest deck in rear* Sailors *lower and furl the sail of the mizzenmast, every movement being carried out in unison with a machine-like rhythm. The bulwarks of the junk are battered and splintered, the sail is frayed and full of jagged holes and patches. In the foreground (the port side of deck) the two elder* Polos *are squatting. Each has a bag of money before him from which they are carefully counting gold coins and packing stacks of these into a chest that stands between them.*

MARCO

[*His voice, hoarse and domineering, comes from the left just before the curtain rises*]

Let go that anchor!

[*A meek "Aye-aye, sir," is heard replying and then a great splash and a long rattling of chains. The curtain then rises discovering the scene as above.* Marco's *voice is again heard, "Lower that mizzensail! Look lively now!"*]

BOATSWAIN

[*With the sailors*]

Aye-aye, sir!

[*They lower the sail, and begin to tie it up trimly*]

MAFFEO

[*Looking up and straightening his cramped back—with a relieved sigh*]

Here's Persia! I'll be glad to get on dry land again. Two years on this foreign tub are too much.

NICOLO

[*With a grunt, intent on the money*]

Keep counting if you want to finish before we go ashore. It's nine hundred thousand now in our money, isn't it?

MAFFEO

[*Nods—counting again*]

This lot will bring it to a million.

[*He begins stacking and packing again*]

BOATSWAIN

[*Chanting as his men work*]

Great were the waves
Volcanoes of foam
Ridge after ridge
To the rim of the world!
Great were the waves!

CHORUS OF SAILORS

Great were the waves!

BOATSWAIN

Fierce were the winds!
Demons screamed!

Their claws rended
Sails into rags,
Fierce were the winds!

CHORUS

Fierce were the winds!

BOATSWAIN

Fire was the sun!
Boiled the blood black,
Our veins hummed
Like bronze kettles.
Fire was the sun!

CHORUS

Fire was the sun!

BOATSWAIN

Long was the voyage!
Life drifted becalmed,
A dead whale awash
In the toil of tides.
Long was the voyage!

CHORUS

Long was the voyage!

BOATSWAIN

Many have died!
Sleep in green water.
Wan faces at home
Pray to the sea.
Many have died!

CHORUS

Many have died!

KUKACHIN

[*Chants the last line after them—sadly*]

Many have died!

[*After a brooding pause she rises and chants in a low voice*]

If I were asleep in green water,
No pang could be added to my sorrow,
Old grief would be forgotten,
I would know peace

SAILORS

There is peace deep in the sea
But the surface is sorrow.

WOMEN

Kukachin will be a Queen!
A Queen may not sorrow
Save for her King!

KUKACHIN

When love is not loved it loves death.
When I sank drowning, I loved Death.
When the pirate's knife gleamed, I loved Death,
When fever burned me I loved Death,
But the man I love saved me.

SAILORS

Death lives in a silent sea,
Gray and cold under cold gray sky,
Where there is neither sun nor wind
Nor joy nor sorrow!

WOMEN

Kukachin will be a wife.

A wife must not sorrow
Save for her man.

KUKACHIN

A hero is merciful to women.
Why could not this man see or feel or know?
Then he would have let me die.

SAILORS

There are harbors at every voyage-end
Where we rest from the sorrows of the sea.

WOMEN

Kukachin will be a mother
A mother may not sorrow
Save for her son.

KUKACHIN

[*Bows her head in resignation. A pause of silence*]

[MARCO POLO *enters briskly from below on the left. He is dressed in full uniform, looking spick and span and self-conscious. His face wears an expression of humorous scorn. He bows ceremoniously to the* PRINCESS, *his attitude a queer mixture of familiarity and an uncertain awe*]

MARCO

Your Highness—

[*Then ingratiatingly*]

—or I suppose I'd better say Majesty now that we've reached Persia—I've got queer news for you. A boat just came from the shore with an official notification that your intended husband, Arghun Khan, is dead and I'm to hand you over to his son, Ghazan, to marry.

[*He hands her a sealed paper*]

See!

KUKACHIN

[*Letting the paper slip from her hand without a glance—dully*]

What does it matter?

MARCO

[*Admiringly—as he picks it up*]

I must say you take it coolly. Of course, come to think of it, never having seen either, one's as good as another.

[*He winds up philosophically*]

And you'll be Queen just the same, that's the main thing.

KUKACHIN

[*With bitter irony*]

So you think that is happiness?

[*Then as* MARCO *stares at her uncertainly, she turns away and looks out over the sea with a sigh—after a pause*]

There, where I see the lights, is that Hormuz?

MARCO

Yes. And I was forgetting, the messenger said Ghazan Khan would come to take you ashore tonight.

KUKACHIN

[*With sudden fear*]

So soon? Tonight?

[*Then rebelliously*]

Is the granddaughter of the Great Kublai no better than a slave? I will not go until it pleases me!

MARCO

Good for you! That's the spirit!

[*Then alarmed at his own temerity—hastily*]

But don't be rash! The Khan probably meant whenever you were willing. And don't mind what I just said.

KUKACHIN

[*Looks at him with a sudden dawning of hope—gently*]

Why should you be afraid of what you said?

MARCO

[*Offended*]

I'm not afraid of anything—when it comes to the point!

KUKACHIN

What point?

MARCO

[*Nonplussed*]

Why—well—when I feel someone's trying to steal what's rightfully mine, for instance.

KUKACHIN

And now—here—you do not feel that?

MARCO

[*With a forced laugh, thinking she is joking*]

Ha! Well—

[*Uncertainly*]

That is—I don't catch your meaning—

[*Then changing the subject abruptly*]

But here's something I want to ask you. Your grandfather entrusted you to my care. He relied on me to prove equal to the task of bringing you safe and sound to your husband. Now I want to ask you frankly if you yourself won't be the first to acknowledge that in spite of typhoons, shipwrecks, pirates and every other known form of bad luck, I've brought you through in good shape?

KUKACHIN

[*With an irony almost hysterical*]

More than anyone in the world, I can appreciate your devotion to duty! You have been a prodigy of heroic accomplishment! In the typhoon when a wave swept me from the deck, was it not you who swam to me as I was drowning?

MARCO

[*Modestly*]

It was easy. Venetians make the best swimmers in the world.

KUKACHIN

[*Even more ironically*]

When the pirates attacked us, was it not your brave sword that warded off their curved knives from my breast and struck them dead at my feet?

MARCO

I was out of practice, too. I used to be one of the crack swordsmen of Venice—and they're the world's foremost, as everyone knows.

KUKACHIN

[*With a sudden change—softly*]

And when the frightful fever wasted me, was it not you who tended me night and day, watching by my bedside like a gentle nurse, even brewing yourself the medicines that brought me back to life?

MARCO

[*With sentimental solemnity*]

My mother's recipes. Simple home remedies—from the best friend I ever had!

KUKACHIN

[*A trifle wildly*]

Oh, yes, you have been a model guardian, Admiral Polo!

MARCO

[*Quickly*]

Thank you, Princess. If I have satisfied you—then if I might ask you a favor, that you put in writing all you've just said in your first letter to the Great Kaan, and also tell your husband?

KUKACHIN

[*Suddenly wildly bitter*]

I will assuredly! I will tell them both of your heroic cruelty in saving me from death!

[*Intensely*]

Why could you not let me die?

MARCO

[*Confusedly*]

You're joking. You certainly didn't want to die, did you?

KUKACHIN

[*Slowly and intensely*]

Yes!

MARCO

[*Puzzled and severe*]

Hum! You shouldn't talk that way.

KUKACHIN

[*Longingly*]

I would be asleep in green water!

MARCO

[*Worriedly, suddenly reaches out and takes her hand*]

Here now, young lady! Don't start getting morbid!

KUKACHIN

[*With a thrill of love*]

Marco!

MARCO

I believe you're feverish. Let me feel your pulse!

KUKACHIN

[*Violently*]

No!

[*She draws her hand from his as if she had been stung*]

MARCO

[*Worriedly*]

Please don't be unreasonable. There'd be the devil to pay if you should suffer a relapse of that fever after I sweated blood to pull you through once already! Do you feel hot?

KUKACHIN

[*Wildly*]

No! Yes! On fire!

MARCO

Are your feet cold?

KUKACHIN

No! Yes! I don't know!

[*Gravely* MARCO *kneels, removes a slipper, and feels the sole of her foot—then pats her foot playfully*]

MARCO

No. They're all right.

[*He gets up—professionally*]

Any cramps?

KUKACHIN

You fool! No! Yes! My heart feels as if it were bursting!

MARCO

It burns?

KUKACHIN

Like a red ember flaring up for the last time before it chills into gray ash forever!

MARCO

Then something must have disagreed with you. Will you let me see your tongue?

KUKACHIN

[*In a queer hysterical state where she delights in self-humiliation*]

Yes! Yes! Anything! I am a Princess of the Imperial blood of Chinghiz and you are a dog! Anything!

[*She sticks out her tongue, the tears streaming down her face as he looks at it*]

MARCO

[*Shakes his head*]

No sign of biliousness. There's nothing seriously wrong. If you would only try to sleep a while—

KUKACHIN

O Celestial God of the Heavens! What have I done that Thou shouldst torture me?

[*Then wildly to* MARCO]

I wished to sleep in the depths of the sea. Why did you awaken me?

MARCO

[*Worried again*]

Perhaps it's brain fever. Does your head ache?

KUKACHIN

No! Does your immortal soul?

MARCO

Don't blaspheme! You're talking as if you were delirious!

[*Then pleadingly*]

For Heaven's sake, try and be calm, Princess! What if your husband, Ghazan Khan, should find you in such a state?

KUKACHIN

[*Calming herself with difficulty—after a pause, bitterly*]

I suppose you are relieved to get me here alive and deliver me—like a cow!

MARCO

[*Injuredly*]

I've only carried out your own grandfather's orders!

KUKACHIN

[*Forcing a smile*]

Won't you miss being my guardian?

[*Striving pitifully to arouse his jealousy*]

When you think of Ghazan protecting me and nursing me when I am sick—and—and loving me? Yes! I will compel him to love me, even though I never love him! He shall look into my eyes and see that I am a woman and beautiful!

MARCO

That's a husband's privilege.

KUKACHIN

Or a man's—a man who has a soul!

[*Mockingly but intensely*]

And that reminds me, Admiral Polo! You are taking advantage of this being the last day to shirk your duty!

MARCO

Shirk! No one can ever say—!

KUKACHIN

It was my grandfather's special command, given to you by Chu-Yin, you told me, that every day you should look into my eyes.

MARCO

[*Resignedly*]

Well, it isn't too late yet, is it?

[*He moves toward her with a sigh of half-impatience with her whims*]

KUKACHIN

Wait. This is the one part of your duty in which I shall have to report you incompetent.

MARCO

[*Hurt*]

I've done my best. I never could discover anything out of the way.

KUKACHIN

There must be something he wished you to find. I myself feel there is something, something I cannot understand, something you must interpret for me! And remember this is your last chance! There is nothing in life I would not give—nothing I would not do—even now it is not too late! See my eyes as those of a woman and not a Princess! Look deeply! I will die if you do not see what is there!

[*She finishes hysterically and beseechingly*]

MARCO

[*Worried—soothingly*]

There! There! Certainly, Princess! Of course, I'll look. And will you promise me that afterwards you'll lie down?

KUKACHIN

Look! See!

[*She throws her head back, her arms outstretched. He bends over and looks into her eyes. She raises her hands slowly above his head as if she were going to pull it down to hers. Her lips part, her whole being strains out to him. He looks for a moment critically, then he grows tense, his face moves hypnotically toward hers, their lips seem about to meet in a kiss. She murmurs*]

Marco!

MARCO

[*His voice thrilling for this second with oblivious passion*]

Kukachin!

MAFFEO

[*Suddenly slapping a stack of coins into the chest with a resounding clank*]

One million!

MARCO

[*With a start, comes to himself and backs away from the* PRINCESS *in terror*]

What, Uncle? Did you call?

MAFFEO

One million in God's money!

[*He and* NICOLO *lock and fasten the box jubilantly*]

KUKACHIN

[*In despair*]

Marco!

MARCO

[*Flusteredly*]

Yes, Princess. I saw something queer! It made me feel feverish too!

[*Recovering a bit—with a sickly smile*]

Oh, there's trouble there, all right! You must be delirious! I advise you to go to sleep.

KUKACHIN

[*With wild despair pulls out a small dagger from the bosom of her dress*]

I obey! I shall sleep forever!

[*But* MARCO, *the man of action, springs forward and wresting the dagger from her hand, flings it over the side. She confronts him defiantly, her eyes wild with grief and rage. He stares at her, dumbfounded and bewildered*]

MARCO

[*Bewilderedly*]

I never believed people—sane people—ever seriously tried—

KUKACHIN

[*Intensely*]

I implored an ox to see my soul! I no longer can endure the shame of living!

MARCO

[*Sheepishly*]

You mean it was a terrible insult when I called you—by your name?

KUKACHIN

[*Bursting into hysterical laughter*]

Yes! How dared you!

MARCO

[*Hastily*]

I ask pardon, Princess! Please forgive me! My only excuse is, I forgot myself. I guess I'll have to stop overworking or I'll suffer a nervous breakdown. I felt like one of those figures in

a puppet show with someone jerking the wires. It wasn't me, you understand. My lips spoke without me saying a word. And here's the funniest part of it all, and what'll explain matters in full, if you can believe it. It wasn't you I was seeing and talking to, not a Princess at all, you'd changed into someone else, someone I've got a good right to—just a girl—

KUKACHIN

[*Again clutching at hope*]

A girl—a woman—you saw in me?

MARCO

[*Enthusiastically, groping in his shirt front*]

Yes. Here she is!

[*He jerks the locket out of an under pocket and presents it to her proudly*]

The future Mrs. Marco Polo!

[*The* PRINCESS *takes it mechanically and stares at it in a stupor as* MARCO *rambles on*]

MARCO

You may believe it or not but like a flash she was standing there in your place and I was talking to her, not you at all!

KUKACHIN

[*Dully*]

But it was my name you spoke.

MARCO

[*Confused*]

I meant to say Donata. That's her name. We're going to be married as soon as I get home.

[*Then as she stares at the miniature—proudly*]

Pretty, isn't she?

KUKACHIN

[*Dully*]

She may have married another.

MARCO

[*Confidently*]

No. Her family needs an alliance with our house.

KUKACHIN

She may have had lovers.

MARCO

[*Simply*]

Oh, no. She's not that kind.

KUKACHIN

[*Staring at the picture*]

She will be middle-aged—fat—and stupid!

MARCO

[*With a grin*]

Well, I don't mind a wife being a bit plump—and who wants a great thinker around the house? Sound common sense and a home where everything runs smooth, that's what I'm after.

KUKACHIN

[*Looks from him to the miniature*]

There is no soul even in your love, which is no better than a mating of swine! And I—!

[*A spasm of pain covers her face—then with hatred and disdain*]

Pig of a Christian! Will you return to this sow and boast that a Princess and a Queen—?

[*With rage*]

Shall I ask as my first wedding present from Ghazan Khan

that he have you flayed and thrown into the street to be devoured by dogs?

MAFFEO AND NICOLO

[*Who have pricked up their ears at this last, rush to the* PRINCESS, *dragging their box between them and prostrate themselves at her feet*]

Mercy! Mercy!

[*She seems not to hear or to see them but stares ahead stonily.* MARCO *beckons* MAFFEO *to one side.*]

MARCO

[*In a whisper*]

Don't be afraid. She doesn't mean a word of it. She's hysterical. Listen, I just noticed the royal barge coming. I'll go and meet the Khan. You keep her from doing anything rash until he gets here.

MAFFEO

Yes.

[*He goes back and crouches again before the* PRINCESS, *keeping a wary eye on her, but she seems turned to stone.* MARCO *comes down and goes off Left. There is the blare of a trumpet, the reflections of lanterns and torches, the sound of runinng about on deck and* MARCO'S *voice giving commands. The* WOMEN *come out to attend the* PRINCESS. *She remains rigid, giving no sign*]

WOMEN

[*In chorus*]

The lover comes,
Who becomes a husband,
Who becomes a son,

Who becomes a father—
In this contemplation lives the woman.

KUKACHIN

[*Her face now a fatalistic mask of acceptance*]

I am not.
Life is.
A cloud hides the sun.
A life is lived.
The sun shines again.
Nothing has changed.
Centuries wither into tired dust.
A new dew freshens the grass.
Somewhere this dream is being dreamed.

[*From the left* MARCO *comes escorting* GHAZAN KHAN, *attended by a train of nobles and slaves with lights. He can be heard saying: "She is a little feverish—the excitement—" All are magnificently dressed, glittering with jewels.* GHAZAN *is a young man, not handsome but noble and manly looking. He comes forward and bows low before her, his attendants likewise. Then he looks into her face and stands fascinated by her beauty. She looks back at him with a calm indifference*]

GHAZAN

[*After a pause—his voice thrilling with admiration*]

If it were possible for a son who loved a noble father to rejoice at that father's death, then I should be that guilty son!

[*As she makes no reply*]

You have heard? Arghun Khan is dead. You must bear the humiliation of accepting his son for husband, a crow to replace an eagle! Forgive me. But with your eyes to watch I may become at least a shadow of his greatness.

KUKACHIN

[*Calmly*]

What am I? I shall obey the eternal will which governs your destiny and mine.

GHAZAN

[*Impetuously*]

You are more beautiful than I had dared to dream! It shall not be I who rules, but you! I shall be your slave! Persia shall be your conquest and everywhere where songs are sung they shall be in praise of your beauty! You shall be Queen of Love—!

KUKACHIN

[*Sharply with pain*]

No!

[*She drops the locket on the floor and grinds it into pieces under her foot*]

MARCO

[*Excitedly*]

Princess! Look out! You're stepping on—

[*She kicks it away from her.* MARCO *stoops on his knees and begins picking up the wreckage in his handkerchief.* KUKACHIN *turns to* GHAZAN *and points to* MARCO]

My first request of you, my Lord, is that you reward this Christian who has brought me here in safety. I ask, as a fitting tribute to his character, that you give an immense feast in his honor. Let there be food in tremendous amounts! He is an exquisite judge of quantity. Let him be urged to eat and drink until he can hold no more, until he becomes his own ideal figure, an idol of stuffed self-satisfaction! Will you do this?

[*She is a trifle hectic now and her manner has grown wilder*]

GHAZAN

Your wish is my will!

KUKACHIN

[*Pointing to a magnificent lion in diamonds on his breast*]
What is that wonderful glittering beast?

GHAZAN

It is the emblem of the Order of the Lion which only great heroes and kings of men may wear.

KUKACHIN

[*Gives a laugh of wild irony*]
Great heroes—kings of men?

[*Then eagerly*]
Will you give it to me? I implore you!

[GHAZAN, *fascinated, yet with a wondering glance, unpins it and hands it to her without a word. She prods* MARCO, *who is still collecting the pieces of the locket with her foot*]
Arise! Let me give you the noble Order of the Lion!

[*She pins the blazing diamond figure on the breast of the stunned* MARCO, *laughing with bitter mockery*]
How well it is set off on the bosom of a sheep!

[*She laughs more wildly*]
Kneel again! Bring me a chest of gold!

[GHAZAN *makes a sign. Two slaves bring a chest of gold coins to her. She takes handfuls and throws them over the kneeling forms of the* POLOS, *laughing*]
Here! Guzzle! Grunt! Wallow for our amusement!

[*The two elder are surreptitiously snatching at the coins but* MARCO *jumps to his feet, his face flushing*]

MARCO

[*In a hurt tone*]

I don't see why you're trying to insult me—just at the last moment. What have I done?

[*Then suddenly forcing a smile*]

But I realize you're not yourself.

GHAZAN

[*Sensing something*]

Has this man offended you? Shall he be killed?

KUKACHIN

[*Wearily*]

No. He has amused me. Let him be fed. Stuff him with food and gold and send him home. And you, My Lord, may I ask that this first night I be allowed to remain on board alone with my women? I am weary!

GHAZAN

Again your wish is my will, even though I will not live until I see you again!

KUKACHIN

[*Exhaustedly*]

I am humbly grateful. Good night, My Lord.

[*She bows.* GHAZAN *and the Court bow before her. They retire toward the left,* MARCO *talking earnestly to the oblivious* GHAZAN *whose eyes are riveted on the* PRINCESS, *who has turned away from them. The two elder* POLOS, *carrying their chest, their pockets stuffed, trudge along last*]

MARCO

The close confinement of a long voyage. I think probably her spleen is out of order.

[*They are gone from sight.* KUKACHIN'S *shoulders quiver as, her head bowed in her hands, she sobs quietly. The ship can be heard making off*]

WOMEN

Weep, Princess of the Wounded Heart,
Weeping heals the wounds of sorrow
Till only the scars remain
And the heart forgets.

KUKACHIN

[*Suddenly runs up to the upper deck and stands outlined against the sky, her arms outstretched—in a voice which is a final, complete renunciation, calls*]

Farewell, Marco Polo!

MARCO

[*His voice comes from over the water, cheery and relieved*]

Good-bye, Your Majesty—and all best wishes for long life and happiness!

[*The* PRINCESS *sinks to her knees, her face hidden in her arms on the bulwark*]

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

ACT THREE

Scene One

Scene: *One year later.*

The Grand Throne Room in the Imperial palace at Cambaluc. Kublai *squats on his throne, aged and sad, listening with an impassive face to* General Bayan *who, dressed in the full military uniform and armor of the Commander-in-Chief is explaining earnestly with several maps in his hand. On* Kublai's *left stands* Chu-Yin, *who is reading. Behind* Bayan *are grouped at attention all the generals of his army with a multitude of young staff officers, all gorgeously uniformed and armored. From the room on the right, the ballroom, a sound of dance music and laughter comes through the closed doors.*

BAYAN

[*Impressively—pointing to the map*]

Here, Your Majesty, is the line of the river Danube which marks the Western boundary of your Empire. Beyond it, lies the West. Our spies report their many petty states are always quarreling. So great is their envy of each other that we could crush each singly and the rest would rejoice. We can mobilize one million horsemen on the Danube within a month.

[*Proudly*]

We would ride their armies down into the sea! Your Empire would extend from ocean to ocean!

KUBLAI

[*Wearily*]

It is much too large already. Why do you want to conquer the West? It must be a pitiful land, poor in spirit and material wealth. We have everything to lose by contact with its greedy hypocrisy. The conqueror acquires first of all the vices of the conquered. Let the West devour itself.

BAYAN

[*Helplessly*]

But—everywhere in the East there is peace!

KUBLAI

[*With hopeless irony*]

Ah! And you are becoming restless?

BAYAN

[*Proudly*]

I am a Mongol—a man of action!

KUBLAI

[*Looking at him with musing irony*]

Hum! You have already conquered the West, I think.

BAYAN

[*Puzzled*]

What, Your Majesty?

[*Then persuasively*]

The West may not be strong but it is crafty. Remember how that Christian, Polo, invented the engine to batter down walls? It would be better to wipe out their cunning now before they make too many engines to weaken the power of men.

[*Then with a sudden inspiration*]

And it would be a righteous war! We would tear down their Christian Idols and set up the image of the Buddha!

KUBLAI

Buddha, the Prince of Peace?

BAYAN

[*Bowing his head as do all his retinue*]

The Gentle One, The Good, The Kind, The Pitiful, The Merciful, The Wise, The Eternal Contemplative One!

KUBLAI

In His Name?

BAYAN

[*Fiercely*]

Death to those who deny Him!

ALL

[*With a great fierce shout and a clanking of swords*]

Death!

KUBLAI

[*Looks up at the ceiling quizzically*]

A thunderbolt?

[*Waits*]

No? Then there is no God!

[*Then to* BAYAN *with a cynical bitter smile*]

August Commander, if you must have war, let it be one without fine phrases—a practical war of few words, as that Polo you admire would say. Leave the West alone. Our interests do not conflict—yet. But there is a group of islands whose silk industry is beginning to threaten the supremacy of our own. Lead your gallant million there—and see to it your war leaves me in peace!

BAYAN

I hear and I obey!

[*He turns to his staff exultantly*]

His Majesty has declared war!

ALL

[*With a fierce cheer*]

Down with the West!

BAYAN

[*Hastily*]

No. Not yet. Down with Japan!

[*They cheer with equal enthusiasm—then he harangues them with the air of a patriotic exhorter*]

His Majesty's benevolence and patience have been exhausted by the continued outrages against our silk nationals perpetrated by unscrupulous Japanese trade-pirates who, in spite of his protests, are breeding and maintaining silkworms for purposes of aggression! We fight in the cause of moral justice, that our silk-makers may preserve their share of the eternal sunlight!

[*A long cheer*]

KUBLAI

[*Smiling—distractedly*]

War without rhetoric, please! Polo has infected you with cant! The West already invades us! Throw open the doors! Music!

[*The doors are thrown open. The dance music sounds loudly*]

Go in and dance, everyone! You, too, General! I revoke my declaration of war—unless you learn to dance and be silent!

[*They all go into the ballroom,* BAYAN *stalking majestically with an injured mien*]

But dancing makes me remember Kukachin whose little dancing feet—! Shut the doors! Music brings back her voice singing!

[*Turning to* CHU-YIN—*harshly*]

Wisdom! No, do not read! What good are wise writings to fight stupidity? One must have stupid writings that men can understand. In order to live even wisdom must be stupid!

A CHAMBERLAIN

[*Enters hurriedly and prostrates himself*]

A courier from Persia!

KUBLAI

[*Excitedly*]

From Kukachin! Bring him here!

[*The* CHAMBERLAIN *dashes to the door and a moment later the* COURIER *enters, travel-stained and weary. He sinks into a heap before the throne.* KUBLAI *shouts at him impatiently*]

KUBLAI

Have you a letter?

COURIER

[*With a great effort holds out a letter*]

Here!

[*He collapses.* CHU-YIN *hands the letter up to* KUBLAI *who takes it eagerly from him. He begins to read at once. The* CHAMBERLAIN *comes back with a cup of wine. The* COURIER *is revived and gets to his knees, waiting humbly*]

CHU-YIN

[*Goes back to* KUBLAI *who has finished reading the short note and is staring somberly before him*]

And did the Little Flower save his Immortal Soul?

[KUBLAI *does not look at him but mutely hands him the letter.* CHU-YIN *becomes grave. He reads aloud*]

"Arghun had died. I am the wife of his son, Ghazan. It does not matter. He is kind but I miss my home and you. I doubt if I shall be blessed with a son. I do not care. I have lost my love of life. My heart beats more and more wearily. Death wooes me. You must not grieve. You wish me to be happy, do you not? And my body may resist Death for a long time yet. Too long. My soul he has already possessed. I wish to commend the unremitting attention to his duty of Admiral Polo. He saved my life three times at the risk of his own. He delivered me to Ghazan. Send him another million. You were right about his soul. What I had mistaken for one I discovered to be a fat woman with a patient virtue. By the time you receive this they will be married in Venice. I do not blame him. But I cannot forgive myself—nor forget—nor believe again in any beauty in the world. I love you the best in life. And tell Chu-Yin I love him too."

[*He lets the letter in his hand drop to his side, his eyes filling, his voice grown husky.* KUBLAI *stares bleakly ahead of him*]

KUBLAI

[*At last rouses himself—harshly to the* COURIER]

Did the Queen give you this in person?

COURIER

Yes, Your Majesty—with a generous gift.

KUBLAI

I can be generous too. Did she appear—ill?

COURIER

Yes. I could scarcely hear her voice.

KUBLAI

You brought no other word?

COURIER

Not from the Queen. I came privately from her. But Admiral Polo suspected my departure and gave me a verbal message which he caused me to memorize.

KUBLAI

[*Harshly—his eyes beginning to gleam with anger*]

Ha! Go on! Repeat!

COURIER

[*Stopping for a moment to freshen his memory*]

He said, tell the Great Kaan that "in spite of perils too numerous to relate, I have delivered my charge safely to Ghazan Khan. In general, she gave but little trouble on the voyage, for although flighty in temper and of a passionate disposition, she never refused to heed my advice for her welfare and as I informed His Majesty, King Ghazan, the responsibilities of marriage and the duties of motherhood will sober her spirit and she will settle down as a sensible wife should. This much I further add, that in humble obedience to your final instructions given me by Mr. Chu-Yin, I looked daily into her eyes."

KUBLAI

[*Bewilderedly to* CHU-YIN]

What? Did you—?

CHU-YIN

[*Miserably*]

Forgive an old fool! I meant it partly in jest as a last chance —to cure her—or to awaken him.

COURIER

[*Continuing*]

"But I have never noted any unnatural change in them except toward the termination of our trip, particularly on the last day,

when I noticed a rather strained expression but this I took to be fever due to her Highness's spleen being sluggish after the long confinement on shipboard."

KUBLAI

[*Choking with wrath*]

O God of the Somber Heavens!

COURIER

And he gave me no money for delivering the message but he promised that you would reward me nobly.

KUBLAI

[*With wild laughter*]

Ha-ha-ha! Stop! Do you dare to madden me?

[*Then suddenly raging*]

Out of my sight, dog, before I have you impaled!

[*The terror-stricken* COURIER *scrambles out like a flash.* KUBLAI *stands up with flashing eyes—revengefully*]

I have reconsidered! I shall conquer the West! I shall lead my armies in person! I shall not leave one temple standing nor one Christian alive who is not enslaved! Their cities shall vanish in flame, their fields shall be wasted! Famine shall finish what I leave undone! And of the city of Venice not one vestige shall remain! And of the body of Marco Polo there shall not be a fragment of bone nor an atom of flesh which will not have shrieked through ten days' torture before it died!

CHU-YIN

Master!

[*He throws himself on his face at* KUBLAI'S *feet*]

Do not torture yourself! Is this Wisdom? Is this the peace of the soul?

KUBLAI

[*Distractedly*]

To revenge oneself—that brings a kind of peace!

CHU-YIN

To revenge equally the wrong of an equal perhaps, but this—?
Can you confess yourself weaker than his stupidity?

KUBLAI

He has murdered her!

CHU-YIN

She does not accuse him. What would be her wish?

KUBLAI

[*His anger passing—wearily and bitterly, after a pause*]

Rise, my old friend, it is I who should be at your feet, not you at mine!

[*He sinks dejectedly on his throne again. After a pause, sadly*]

She will die. Why is this? What purpose can it serve? My hideous suspicion is that God is only an infinite, insane energy which creates and destroys without other purpose than to pass eternity in avoiding thought. Then the stupid man becomes the Perfect Incarnation of Omnipotence and the Polos are the true children of God!

[*He laughs bitterly*]

Ha! How long before we shall be permitted to die, my friend? I begin to resent life as the insult of an ignoble inferior with whom it is a degradation to fight!

[*Broodingly—after a pause*]

I have had a foreboding she would die. Lately, to while away time, I experimented with the crystal. I do not believe the magic nonsense about it but I do consider that, given a focus,

the will can perhaps overcome the limits of the senses. Whatever the explanation be, I looked into the crystal and willed to see Kukachin in Persia and she appeared, sitting alone in a garden, beautiful and sad, apart from life, waiting—

[*Brokenly*]

My eyes filled with tears. I cried out to her—and she was gone!

[*Then suddenly—to the* CHAMBERLAIN]

Bring me the crystal!

[*To* CHU-YIN *as the* CHAMBERLAIN *goes*]

Marco, the true ruler of the world, will have come to Venice by this time. My loathing grows so intense I feel he must jump into the crystal at my bidding. And—in the cause of wisdom, say—we must see what he is doing now.

[*The* CHAMBERLAIN *returns with the crystal.* KUBLAI *takes it eagerly from his hand and stares fixedly into it*]

CHU-YIN

[*Protestingly*]

Why do you wish to hurt yourself further?

KUBLAI

[*Staring fixedly*]

I shall observe dispassionately. It is a test of myself I want to make as a penalty for my weakness a moment ago.

[*He sees something*]

Ah—it begins.

[*A pause. The light grows dimmer and dimmer on the stage proper as it begins to come up on the extreme foreground*]

I see—a city whose streets are canals—it is evening—a house. I begin to see through the walls— Ah!

[*The lights come up again on the back stage as the forestage is fully revealed. The* KAAN *on his throne and* CHU-YIN *are seen dimly, behind and above, like beings on another plane. At the center of the forestage is a great banquet table garishly set with an ornate gold service. A tall majordomo in a gorgeous uniform enters and stands at attention as the procession begins. First come the Guests, male and female, a crowd of good substantial bourgeois, who stare about with awe and envy and are greatly impressed by the gold plate*]

A MAN

They've laid out a pile of money here!

A WOMAN

Is that gold service really gold?

ANOTHER

Absolutely. I can tell without biting it.

A MAN

They must have cash, whoever they are.

A WOMAN

Do you think they're really the Polos?

ANOTHER

They looked like greasy Tartars to me.

ANOTHER

That was their queer clothes.

A MAN

And remember they've been gone twenty-odd years.

ANOTHER

In spite of that, I thought I could recognize Maffeo.

A WOMAN

Will Donata know Marco, I wonder?

A MAN

What's more to her point, will he recognize her?

A WOMAN

Imagine her waiting all this time!

ANOTHER

How romantic! He must be terribly rich—if it's really him.

A MAN

We'll soon know. That's why we were invited.

A WOMAN

Ssshh! Here comes Donata now. How old she's getting to look!

ANOTHER

And how fat in the hips!

A MAN

[*Jokingly*]

That's the way I like 'em, and perhaps Marco—

[DONATA *enters on the arm of her father, a crafty, wizened old man. She has grown into a stout middle-age but her face is unlined and still pretty in a bovine, good-natured way. All bow and they return this salutation*]

ALL

Congratulations, Donata!

[*She blushes and turns aside in an incongruous girlish confusion*]

FATHER

[*Proud but pretending querulousness*]

Don't tease her now! The girl's nervous enough already. And it may not be Marco after all but only a joke someone's put up on us.

A WOMAN

No one could be so cruel!

ALL

[*Suddenly with a great gasp*]

Oh, listen!

[*An orchestra vigorously begins a flowery, sentimental Italian tune. This grows into quite a blare as the musicians enter from the right, six in number, in brilliant uniforms*]

Oh, look!

[*The musicians form a line, three on each side by the stairs on right*]

Oh, see!

[*A procession of servants begins to file one by one through the ranks of musicians, each carrying on his head or upraised hand an enormous platter on which are whole pigs, fowl of all varieties, roasts, vegetables, salads, fruits, nuts, dozens of bottles of wine. The servants arrange these on the table, in symmetrical groups, with the trained eye for display of window-dressers, until the table, with the bright light flooding down on it, closely resembles the front of a pretentious delicatessen store. Meanwhile*]

See! What a turkey! Such a goose! The fattest pig I ever saw! What ducks! What vegetables! Look at the wine! A feast for the Gods! And all those servants! An army! And the orchestra! What expense! Lavish! They must be worth millions!

[*The three* POLOS *make their grand entrance from the stairs on right, walking with bursting self-importance*

between the files of musicians who now blare out a triumphant march. The two elder precede MARCO. *All three are dressed in long robes of embroidered crimson satin reaching almost to the ground. The guests give a new united gasp of astonishment*]

Is it they? Is that old Nicolo? That's Maffeo's nose! No! It isn't them at all! Well, if it's a joke, I don't see the point. But such robes! Such hand embroidery! Such material! They must be worth millions!

DONATA

[*Falteringly*]

Is that him, father? I can't tell.

[*She calls faintly*]

Marco!

[*But he pretends not to hear. He gives a sign at which the three take off their robes and hand them to the servants. They have even more gorgeous blue ones underneath.* MARCO *addresses the servants in a false voice*]

MARCO

My good men, you may sell these rich robes and divide the proceeds among yourselves! And here is a little something extra.

[*He tosses a handful of gold to the servants and another to the musicians. A mad scramble results. The guests gasp. They seem inclined to join in the scramble*]

GUESTS

How generous! What prodigality! What indifference to money! They throw it away like dirt. They must be worth millions!

MARCO

[*In the same false voice*]

Our guests look thirsty. Pass around the wine.

[*The servants do so. The guests gaze, smell, taste*]

ALL

What a vintage! What flavor! What bouquet! How aged! It must have cost twenty lire a bottle!

[*At another signal the three* Polos *take off their blue robes*]

MARCO

[*Regally*]

Give those to the musicians!

[*They are revealed now in their old dirty, loose Tartar traveling dress and look quite shabby. The guests gape uncertainly. Then* Marco *declares grandly*]

You look astonished, good people, but this is a moral lesson to teach you not to put too much faith in appearances, for behold!

[*He slits up the wide sleeves of his own robe, as do his father and uncle, and now the three, standing beside a big empty space which has been purposely left at the very center of the table at the front, lower their opened sleeves, and, as the musicians, obeying this signal, start up a great blare, let pour from them a perfect stream of precious stones which forms a glittering multicolored heap. This is the final blow. The guests stare pop-eyed, open-mouthed, speechless for a second. Then their pent-up admiration breaks forth*]

ALL

Extraordinary! Jewels! Gems! Rubies! Emeralds! Diamonds! Pearls! A king's ransom! Millions!

MARCO

[*Suddenly with his hail-fellow-well-met joviality*]

Well, folks, are you all tongue-tied? Isn't one of you going to say welcome home? And Miss Donata, don't I get a kiss? I'm still a bachelor!

[*Immediately with mad shouts of "Bravo!" "Welcome home!" "Hurrah for the Polos!" etc., etc., the guests bear down on them in a flood. There is a confused whirl of embraces, kisses, back-slaps, handshakes and loud greetings of all sorts.* MARCO *manages to get separated and pulls* DONATA *down front to the foreground*]

DONATA

[*Half swooning*]

Marco!

MARCO

[*Moved*]

My old girl!

[*They kiss, then he pushes her away*]

Here! Let me get a good look at you! Why, you're still as pretty as a picture and you don't look a day older!

DONATA

[*Exaltedly*]

My beloved prince!

MARCO

[*Jokingly*]

No, if I was a prince I'd never have remained single all these years in the East! I'm a hero, that's what! And all the twenty-

odd years I kept thinking of you, and I was always intending to write—

[*He pulls the pieces of the miniature wrapped in the handkerchief out of his pocket*]

Here's proof for you! Look at yourself! You're a bit smashed but that was done in a hand-to-hand fight with pirates. Now don't I deserve another kiss?

DONATA

[*Giving it*]

My hero!

[*Then jealously*]

But I know all the heathen women must have fallen in love with you.

MARCO

Oh, maybe one or two or so—but I didn't have time to waste on females. I kept my nose to the grindstone every minute.

[*Proudly*]

And I got results. I don't mind telling you, Donata, I'm worth over two millions! How's that for keeping my promise? Worth while your waiting, eh?

[*He slaps her on the back*]

DONATA

Yes, my wonder boy!

[*Then worriedly*]

You said there were one or two women? But you were true in spite of them, weren't you?

MARCO

I tell you I wouldn't have married the prettiest girl in Cathay!

[*This with emphasis. Then abruptly*]

But never mind any other girl.

[*He chucks her under the chin*]

What I want to know is when this girl is going to marry me?

DONATA

[*Softly*]

Any time!

[*They hug. The guests group about them kittenishly, pointing and murmuring, "What a romance! What a romance!"*]

DONATA'S FATHER

[*Seizing the opportunity*]

Friends, I take this opportunity to publicly announce the betrothal of my daughter, Donata, to Marco Polo of this City!

[*Another wild round of congratulations, kisses, etc.*]

MARCO

[*His voice sounding above the hubbub*]

Let's eat, friends!

[*They swirl to their places behind the long table. When they stand their faces can be seen above the piles of food but when they sit they are out of sight*]

No ceremony among friends. Just pick your chair. All ready? Let's sit down then!

[*With one motion they disappear*]

VOICE OF DONATA'S FATHER

But, first, before we regale ourselves with your cheer, won't you address a few words to your old friends and neighbors who have gathered here on this happy occasion?

[*Applause.* MARCO *is heard expostulating but finally he gives in*]

MARCO

All right, if you'll promise to go ahead and eat and not wait for me.

[*His head appears, his expression full of importance. Servants flit about noisily. He coughs and begins with dramatic feeling*]

My friend and neighbors of old, your generous and whole-hearted welcome touches me profoundly. I would I had the gift of oratory to thank you fittingly, but I am a simple man, an ordinary man, I might almost say,—a man of affairs used to dealing in the hard facts of life, a silent man given to deeds not words—

[*Here he falters fittingly*]

And so now—forgive my emotion—words fail me—

[*Here he clears his throat with an important cough and bursts forth into a memorized speech in the grand Chamber of Commerce style*]

But I'll be glad to let you have a few instructive facts about the silk industry as we observed it in the Far East, laying especial emphasis upon the keystone of the whole silk business —I refer to the breeding of worms!

[*A few hungry guests start to eat. Knives and forks and spoons rattle against plates. Soup is heard.* MARCO *strikes a good listening attitude so he will be sure not to miss a word his voice utters and warms to his work*]

Now, to begin with, there are millions upon millions of capital invested in this industry, millions of contented slaves labor unremittingly millions of hours per annum to obtain the best results in the weaving and dyeing of the finished product, but I don't hesitate to state that all this activity is relatively un-

important beside the astounding fact that in the production of the raw material there are constantly employed millions upon millions upon millions of millions of worms!

ONE VOICE

[*Rather muffled by roast pig*]

Hear!

[*But the rest are all absorbed in eating and a perfect clamor of knives and forks resounds.* MARCO *begins again but this time the clamor is too great, his words are lost, only the one he lays such emphasis upon can be distinguished*]

MARCO

Millions! . . . millions! . . . millions! . . . millions!

KUBLAI

[*Who from the height of his golden throne, crystal in hand, has watched all this with fascinated disgust while* CHU-YIN *has sat down to read again, now turns away with a shudder of loathing—and, in spite of himself, a shadow of a smile—and lets the crystal fall from his hand and shatter into bits with a loud report. Instantly there is darkness and from high up in the darkness* KUBLAI'S *voice speaking with a pitying scorn*]

The Word became their flesh, they say. Now all is flesh! And can their flesh become the Word again?

DARKNESS

ACT THREE

Scene Two

Scene: *Grand Throne Room in the Imperial Palace at Cambaluc, about two years later. The walls tower majestically in shadow, their elaborate detail blurred into a background of half-darkness.*

Kublai *sits at the top of his throne, cross-legged in the posture of an idol, motionless, wrapped in contemplation. He wears a simple white robe without adornment of any sort. A brilliant light floods down upon him in one concentrated ray. His eyes are fixed on a catafalque, draped in heavy white silk, which stands in the center of the room, emphasized by another downpouring shaft of light.*

Chu-Yin *stands on the level below, on* Kublai's *left. On the main floor are the nobles and people of the court, grouped as in Act One, Scene Six.*

There is a long pause clamorous with the pealing of the thousands of bells in the city, big and little, near and far. Every figure in the room is as motionless as the Kaan *himself. Their eyes are kept on him with the ardent humility and respect of worship. Behind their impassive faces, one senses a tense expectancy of some sign from the throne. At last,* Kublai *makes a slight but imperious motion of command with his right hand. Immediately the women all turn with arms outstretched toward the catafalque. Their voices rise together in a long, rhythmic wail of mourning; their arms with one motion move slowly up; their voices attain a prolonged note of unbearable poignancy;*

their heads are thrown back, their arms appeal to Heaven in one agonized gesture of despair. Here the KAAN *makes the same barely perceptible sign of command again. The voices are instantly silenced. With one motion, the women throw themselves prostrate on the floor. The bells, except for one slow deep-toned one in the palace itself, are almost instantly hushed. At the same instant, from outside, at first faint, but growing momentarily in volume, comes the sound of funeral music. A moment later the funeral procession enters. The men sink to the cross-legged position of prayer, their heads bowed.*

First come the musicians, nine in number, men in robes of bright red. They are followed by the chorus of nine singers, five men and four women, all of them aged, with bent bodies, their thin, cracked voices accompanying the music in queer, breaking waves of lamentation. These are masked, the men with a male mask of grief, the women with a female. All are dressed in deep black with white edging to their robes. After them comes a troupe of young girls and boys, dressed in white with black edging, moving slowly backward in a gliding, interweaving dance pattern. Their faces are not masked but are fixed in a disciplined, traditional expression of bewildered, uncomprehending grief that is like a mask. They carry silver censers which they swing in unison toward the corpse of the PRIÑCESS KUKACHIN, *carried on a bier directly behind them on the shoulders of eight princes of the blood in black armor.*

Accompanying the bier, one at each corner, are four priests —the foremost two, a Confucian and a Taoist, the

latter two, a Buddhist and a Moslem. Each walks with bent head reading aloud to himself from his Holy Book. The princes lift the bier of KUKACHIN *to the top of the catafalque. Her body is wrapped in a winding sheet of deep blue, a jeweled golden head-dress is on her black hair, her face is white and clear as a statue's. The young boys and girls place their smoking censers about the catafalque, the incense ascending in clouds about the Princess as if it were bearing her soul with it. The music and the singing cease as the dancers, singers, and musicians form on each side, and to the rear, of the catafalque and sink into attitudes of prayer.*

KUBLAI *speaks to the priests in a voice of command in which is weariness and disbelief.*

KUBLAI

Peace! She does not need your prayers. She was a prayer!

[*With one motion they shut their books, raise their heads and stare before them in silence.* KUBLAI *continues —sadly*]

Can words recall life to her beauty?

[*To the* PRIEST OF TAO]

Priest of Tao, will you conquer death by your mystic Way?

PRIEST OF TAO

[*Bowing his head in submission—fatalistically*]

Which is the greater evil, to possess or to be without? Death is.

CHORUS

[*In an echo of vast sadness*]

Death is.

KUBLAI

[*To the* CONFUCIAN]

Follower of Confucius, the Wise, have you this wisdom?

PRIEST OF CONFUCIUS

[*Slowly*]

Before we know life, how can we know death?

[*Then as the* TAOIST, *submissively*]

Death is.

CHORUS

[*As before*]

Death is.

KUBLAI

[*To the* BUDDHIST PRIEST]

Worshiper of Buddha, can your self-overcoming overcome that greatest overcomer of self?

BUDDHIST PRIEST

This is a thing which no god can bring about: that what is subject to death should not die.

[*Then as the others, submissively*]

Death is.

CHORUS

[*As before*]

Death is.

KUBLAI

[*Wearily*]

And your answer, priest of Islam?

PRIEST OF ISLAM

It is the will of Allah!

[*Submissively*]

Death is.

CHORUS

Death is. Death is. Death is.

[*Their voices die away*]

KUBLAI

[*After a pause*]

What is death?

[*A long pause. His eyes rest in loving contemplation on the body of* KUKACHIN. *Finally he speaks tenderly to her with a sad smile*]

Girl whom we call dead, whose beauty is even in death more living than we, smile with infinite silence upon our speech, smile with infinite forbearance upon our wisdom, smile with infinite remoteness upon our sorrow, smile as a star smiles!

[*His voice appears about to break. A muffled sound of sobbing comes from the prostrate women.* KUBLAI *regains control over his weakness and rises to his feet—with angry self-contempt*]

No more! That is for poets!

[*With overstressed arrogance—assertively*]

I am the Great Kaan!

[*Everyone in the room rises with one motion of assertion*]

CHORUS

[*Accompanied by a clangor of brass from the musicians—recite with discordant vigor*]

Greatest of the Great!
Son of Heaven!
Lord of Earth!
Sovereign of the World!
Ruler over Life and Death!

KUBLAI

[*Silences them by an imperious gesture—and now even the great palace bell is stilled—half-mockingly but assertively*]

The Son of Heaven? Then I should know a prayer. Sovereign of the World? Then I command the World to pray!

[*With one motion all sink to the position of prayer*]

In silence! Prayer is beyond words! Contemplate the eternal life of Life! Pray thus!

[*He himself sinks to the position of prayer—a pause—then slowly*]

In silence—for one concentrated moment—be proud of life! Know in your heart that the living of life can be noble! Know that the dying of death can be noble! Be exalted by life! Be inspired by death! Be humbly proud! Be proudly grateful! Be immortal because life is immortal. Contain the harmony of womb and grave within you! Possess life as a lover—then sleep requited in the arms of death! If you awake, love again! If you sleep on, rest in peace! Who knows which? What does it matter? It is nobler not to know!

[*A pause of silence. He rises to his feet. With one motion all do likewise.* KUBLAI *sits back on his cushions again, withdrawing into contemplation. The Mongol* CHRONICLER *comes forward to fulfill his function of chanting the official lament for the dead. He declaims in a high wailing voice accompanied by the musicians and by the* CHORUS *who sway rhythmically and hum a rising and falling mourning accompaniment*]

CHRONICLER

We lament the shortness of life. Life at its longest is brief enough.

Too brief for the wisdom of joy, too long for the knowledge of sorrow.

Sorrow becomes despair when death comes to the young, untimely.

Oh, that her beauty could live again, that her youth could be born anew.

Our Princess was young as Spring, she was beautiful as a bird or flower.

Cruel when Spring is smitten by Winter, when birds are struck dead in full song, when the budding blossom is blighted!

Alas that our Princess is dead, she was the song of songs, the perfume of perfumes, the perfect one!

Our sobs stifle us, our tears wet the ground, our lamentations sadden the wind from the West.

[*Bows submissively—speaks*]

Yet we must bow humbly before the Omnipotent.

CHORUS

We must be humble.

CHRONICLER

Against Death all Gods are powerless.

CHORUS

All Gods are powerless.

[*Their voices die into silence*]

KUBLAI

[*After a pause—wearily*]

Leave her in peace. Go.

[*The Court leaves silently at his command in a formal,*

expressionless order. The four priests go first, beginning to pray silently again. They are followed by the nobles and officials with their women coming after. Finally the young boys and girls take up their censers and dance their pattern out backward, preceded by the musicians. Only the CHORUS *remain, grouped in a semicircle behind the catafalque, motionless, and* CHU-YIN *who stays at the left hand of* KUBLAI. *The music fades away.* KUBLAI *takes his eyes from the dead girl with a sigh of bitter irony*]

KUBLAI

Oh, Chu-Yin, my Wise Friend, was the prayer I taught them wisdom?

CHU-YIN

It was the wisdom of pride. It was thy wisdom.

CHORUS

[*Echoing sadly*]

Thy wisdom.

KUBLAI

Was it not truth?

CHU-YIN

It was the truth of power. It was thy truth.

CHORUS

[*As before*]

Thy truth.

KUBLAI

My pride, my power? My wisdom, my truth? For me there remains only—her truth!

[*Then after staring at* KUKACHIN *for a second, bitterly*]

Her truth! She died for love of a fool!

CHU-YIN

No. She loved love. She died for beauty.

KUBLAI

Your words are hollow echoes of the brain. Do not wound me with wisdom. Speak to my heart!

[*Sadly—his eyes again on* KUKACHIN]

Her little feet danced away the stamp of armies. Her smile made me forget the servile grin on the face of the World. In her eyes' mirror I watched myself live protected from life by her affection—a simple old man dying contentedly a little, day after pleasant day.

CHU-YIN

[*Bowing—compassionately*]

Then weep, old man. Be humble and weep for your child. The old should cherish sorrow.

[*He bows again and goes out silently*]

KUBLAI

[*After a pause, gets up and descending from his throne, slowly approaches the catafalque, speaking to the dead girl softly as he does so—with a trembling smile*]

I think you are hiding your eyes, Kukachin. You are a little girl again. You are playing hide and seek. You are pretending. Did we not once play such games together, you and I? You have made your face still, you have made your face cold, you have set your lips in a smile so remote—you are pretending even that you are dead!

[*He is very near her now. His voice breaks—more and more intensely*]

Let us stop playing! It is late. It is time you were asleep. Open your eyes and laugh! Laugh now that the game is over.

Take the blindfold from my dim eyes. Whisper your secret in my ear. I—I am dead and you are living! Weep for me, Kukachin! Weep for the dead!

[*He stretches his arms out to her beseechingly—pauses, standing beside the body, staring down at her; then, after a moment, he passes his hand over her face—tremblingly —with a beautiful tenderness of grief*]

So, little Kukachin—so, Little Flower—you have come back—they could not keep you—you were too homesick—you wanted to return—to gladden my last days—

[*He no longer tries to control his grief. He sobs like a simple old man, bending and kissing his granddaughter on the forehead—with heart-breaking playfulness*]

I bid you welcome home, Little Flower! I bid you welcome home!

[*He weeps, his tears falling on her calm white face*]

CURTAIN

EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE

The play is over. The lights come up brilliantly in the theatre. In an aisle seat in the first row a MAN *rises, conceals a yawn in his palm, stretches his legs as if they had become cramped by too long an evening, takes his hat from under the seat and starts to go out slowly with the others in the audience. But although there is nothing out of the ordinary in his actions, his appearance excites general comment and surprise for he is dressed as a Venetian merchant of the later Thirteenth Century. In fact, it is none other than* MARCO POLO *himself, looking a bit sleepy, a trifle puzzled, and not a little irritated as his thoughts, in spite of himself, cling for a passing moment to the play just ended. He appears quite unaware of being unusual and walks in the crowd without self-consciousness, very much as one of them. Arrived in the lobby his face begins to clear of all disturbing memories of what had happened on the stage. The noise, the lights of the streets, recall him at once to himself. Impatiently he waits for his car, casting a glance here and there at faces in the groups around him, his eyes impersonally speculative, his bearing stolid with the dignity of one who is sure of his place in the world. His car, a luxurious limousine, draws up at the curb. He gets in briskly, the door is slammed, the car edges away into the traffic and* MARCO POLO, *with a satisfied sigh at the sheer comfort of it all, resumes his life.*

THE END

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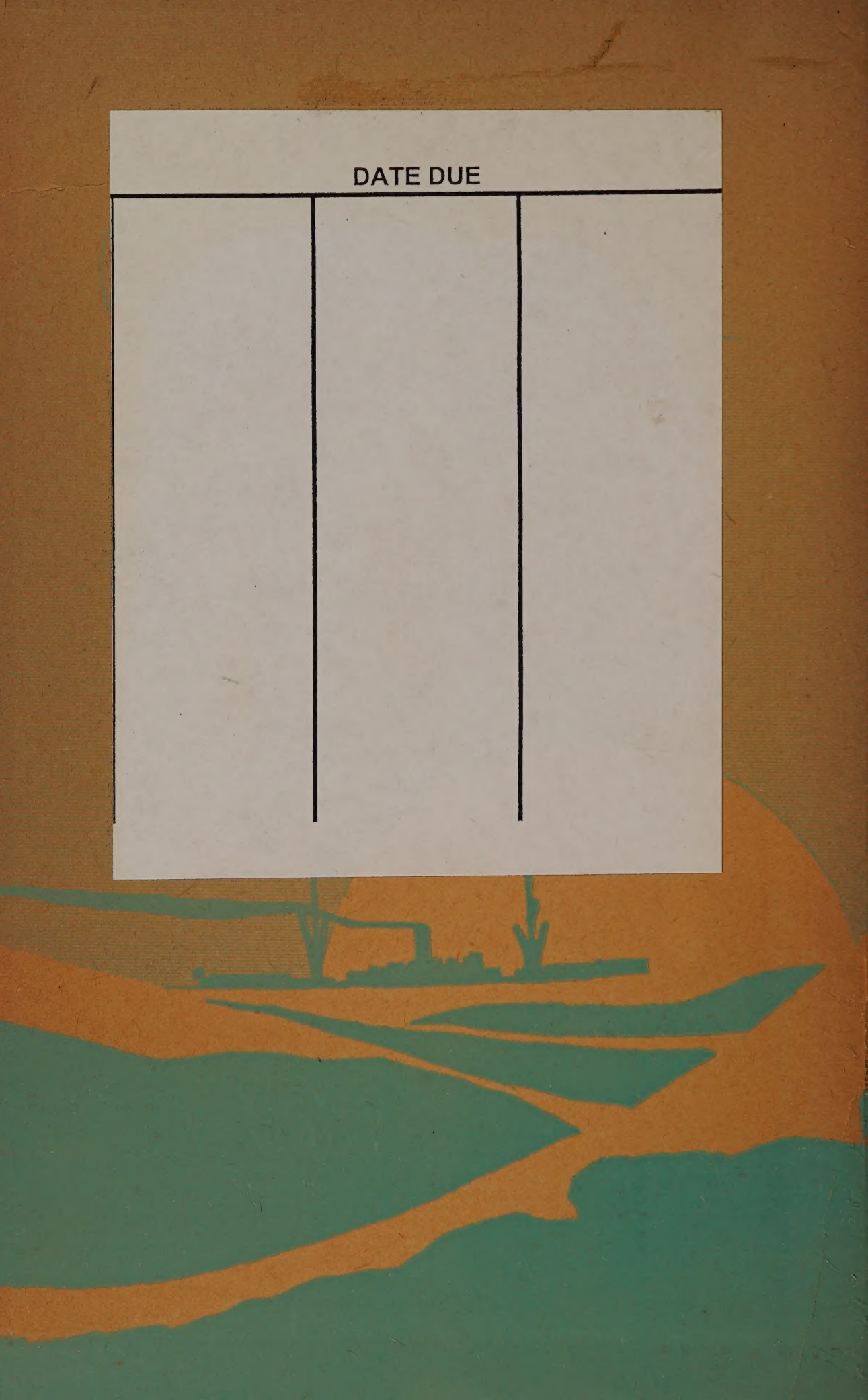

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